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Hiding and Seeking Identity: The Female Figure in the Novels of Pakistani Female Writers in English: A Feminist Approach

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Hiding and Seeking Identity: The Female Figure in the Novels of Pakistani  
Female Writers in English: A Feminist Approach

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

Pakistani female writers in English continue to highlight the struggles of women within patriarchal Pakistani society. The emphasis of my research project has been to explore and analyse the struggle and resistance of female figures against patriarchal structures as presented through the fiction of my chosen female writers. I have analysed the works of Pakistani Anglophone women writers, Bapsi Sidhwa and Qaisra Shahraz. The thesis concludes with the analysis of a novel by a contemporary Urdu Pakistani female writer, Umera Ahmad. Analysing an Urdu feminist writing along with feminist writing in English has allowed my thesis a broader scope as Urdu feminist writings are an indispensable part of the Pakistani literary canvas in general and feminist literary canvas in particular.

Through sexual awakening, sexual victimisation (rape, forced marriage) and sexual discrimination Sidhwa, Shahraz and Ahmad's women learn of the gendered oppression that works through their bodies. Grappling with a range of victimisations, the female figures, from across the chosen works, expose how female sexuality and bodies are defined, controlled and exploited by men under the guise of socio-cultural and religious traditions. My research explores both the violent and subtle ways in which patriarchy represses female sexuality to control and restrict women in Pakistani society.

A further underlying motive of my research has been to stress the importance of writing in allowing the female figures a 'voice' to aid their struggle against patriarchal structures. I believe feminist writings, specifically by female authors, both in English and Urdu, are a much needed contribution to the already existing Pakistani literary canon. Therefore, the works of chosen female writers are critically examined in order to understand their role and importance towards addressing, exploring and devising solutions, through a literary medium, to the issues women face in patriarchal society.

This thesis is dedicated  
to my mother

**Shahnaz Beagum**

*“Meri payari maan kay naam”*

*“Yeh kamyabian, izaat yeh naam tum say hai  
Khuda nay jo diya hai maqaam tum say hai  
Tumhary dam day say hai khilay mery lahu main ghulaab  
Mery wajood ka sara nizaam tum say hai  
Kahan besarat-e-jahan aur main kamsin-o-nadan  
Yeh meri jeet ka sab ihtemaam tum say hai”*

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## Introduction

I am the one you needed to bury alive... to feel fearless as the wind again  
For you never knew... that stones can never suppress a voice.

I am the one you hid beneath...the weight of your traditions  
For you never knew...that light can never fear pitch darkness.

In the name of modesty...you bought and sold me  
I am the one you gave away in marriage...So you could be rid of me  
For you never knew...that a nation cannot emerge if the mind is enslaved.

For a long time you have profited by my shyness and modesty  
Traded so well on my motherhood and fidelity,  
Now the season for flowers to bloom in our laps and minds is here.

(Naheed, 1991, p.43)

The above poem by a Pakistani female feminist poet, Kishwar Naheed<sup>1</sup>, speaks of the plight of being a woman in Pakistani society. It is a woman's voice raised in awareness of her exploitations at the hands of men. It is a cry against a society where women are allowed little recognition as individuals, where they exist and are defined in relation to men to whom they belong. Pakistani society can be called patriarchal due to the elevation of male privilege and its harsh treatment of women, justified in the name of cultural traditions and religion. In this society men are born with respect, dignity and worth whereas women have to strive to earn these qualities. Men are considered as individuals and women are thought of as bodies. Therefore, it is next to impossible for a woman to walk out into the public without being made conscious of her body by the looks she receives from total strangers. Throughout her life a woman's body is subjected to scrutiny, at home by the father and brother(s) and outside by a range of men who feel

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<sup>1</sup> Kishwar Naheed was born in 1940 and currently lives in Lahore, Pakistan. Naheed has been one of the most vocal feminists of Pakistan who chose poetry as her medium of resistance against the oppression of women. She is mostly known for her poem 'We Sinful Women'. Naheed is widely known for her bold critique of the political exploitation of female bodies and sexuality. Rukhsana Ahmad (1991) asserts, "if there is a Pakistani feminist who poses a serious threat to men through her work, her lifestyle, her manner and through her ceaseless verbal challenge, it is Kishwar Naheed" (Ahmad, 1991, p.20).

it their right to critically examine the woman in view. Women in Pakistan have been struggling to prove their worth as equally intelligent members of their society, capable of delivering and contributing to the development of the country. However, there is still a long way to go as feudal, tribal and political men insist on a degrading position for women in Pakistani society.

The present research, based on the works of Pakistani women writers Bapsi Sidhwa, Qaisra Shahraz and Umera Ahmad, captures the female figure in its entire complexity of defining herself against patriarchal structures of Pakistani society. Pakistani fiction in English provides ample opportunities for feminist explorations regarding women living under patriarchy. These literary discussions cover a wide range of issues regarding the position of women in society at large. Regarding the role of feminism in literature Miti Pandey (2003) asserts:

Feminism in literature refers to a mode that approaches a text with foremost concern for the nature of female experience in it. The fictional experience of characters, the rational, intuitional or imaginative capacity of an author, the experience implicit in language of structure that interrogates the cultural prescriptions, that subordinate and trivialise women and treat them as inferiors are the primary concerns of female fiction writers from feminist perspective. (Pandey, 2003, p. 1)

A feminist analysis of literature allows the reader to understand the role of the female figure within the society in which she is being described, along with the social changes around her. Zia Ahmed (2009) stresses how literature proves crucial in representing social changes in a society. The representation of women through literature constitutes a significant contribution towards understanding the position of women in that society (Ahmed, 2009, p.90). In this regard, the Pakistani writings in general, and specifically in English, carry an important position. Pakistani Anglophone fiction is an emerging field still in its nascent stage; however, it carries much significance as it is becoming available to the English speaking world. This exposure to the international global market and Western readers has opened new avenues for Pakistani fiction.



The roots of Pakistani English literature can be traced back to the sub-continent where politically charged writings by educated Muslim women like Mumtaz Shahnawaz (1912-1948) paved the way for other women. Her novel *The Heart Divided* is the first South Asian English novel on partition which is, “permeated by a strong consciousness of herself as an educated Muslim woman and political activist, welding both the personal and the public” (Shamsie, 2005, p.xi). During the 1940s, the years when Muslims of India were striving for a separate homeland, women were encouraged to step out of their domestic spheres and aid the struggle for independence. As Anjali Bhardwaj Datta (2006) notes, “Partition pushed women into fashioning new survival strategies and opened up new avenues of education, training and employment for them...as boundaries between private and public shifted back and forth to accommodate this reorganisation” (Datta, 2006, p.2229). History is rife with examples of Muslim women such as Begum Shahnawaz, Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan and Begum Shaista Ikramullah who participated in public gatherings, held protests and rallies to speed up the creation of Pakistan. However, as Pakistan came into existence in 1947, women were once again forced to remain within domestic spheres and to avoid public participation. The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, proposed a secular and democratic set up for the new country. He particularly emphasised the importance of women’s participation in nation building and encouraged their educational and professional development. His approach, however, was soon forgotten after his tragic and sudden death in 1948. The newly built state passed through many democratic and military eras until the 1977 military era of General Zia-ul-Haq during which religious extremist forces began to gain political power. The major political change of Zia-ul-Haq’s military era, especially concerning women, was the implementation of strict Islamic laws. Muneeza Shamsie (2005) explains:

Earlier in the 1960s, the martial law of Ayub Khan defied orthodoxy to promulgate 1961 Family Laws Ordinance, drawn up by Pakistani women activists, with clauses that discouraged polygamy, regulated divorce procedures and introduced a minimum marriageable age for women. However, the martial law of Zia-ul-Haq held these in abeyance, and in 1979 he introduced the Hudood Ordinance which does not differentiate between rape and adultery in order to Islamise society. New blasphemy

laws came into being; both were used to victimise the weakest and the most vulnerable women and minorities. (Shamsie, 2005, p.xiii)

As Pakistani society became increasingly dominated by Zia's conservative Islamic ideology, women, unsurprisingly, became a central concern of political and national discourse. In particular, the female body and sexuality became, in the words of a Muslim feminist, Miriam Cooke, "the symbolic centre of their concerns and debates" (Cooke, 2001, p.viii). Speaking in the context of Arab Muslim women, Cooke (2001), explains how "[the] conservative religious authorities in the Arab world are publishing tomes about women's importance to the virtuous Muslim community, they are also dictating constricting rules for their behaviour" (Cooke, 2001, p.viii). In the case of Pakistan, Farida Shaheed (1991) in her chapter 'The Cultural Articulation of Patriarchy' rightly notes that, "The selective implementation of Islam has been responsible for the entrenchment of an all pervasive patriarchal system of inequality and subjugation" (Shaheed, 1991, p.140). This patriarchal system specifically seeks to control women through cultural traditions and rules that, in the words of Sandra Lee Bartky (1997), "produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognisably feminine" (Bartky, 1997, p.132). In other words, a female body disciplined through the tools of purdah, modesty and shame to achieve passive, silent and subordinate women.

Husain Haqqani (2005) in his book *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* elaborates on some of the legal regulations of Zia's regime that clearly degraded women such as, the restriction on women's sports and their participation in performing arts and the rendering of the legal testimony of a woman to half the weight as compared to a man. In addition to this, women were required to have a woman or a man as a witness to their signatures before entering a financial contract (Haqqani, 2005, p.144). Haqqani further notes that, "Clerics who supported these laws argued that women were emotional and irritable, with inferior faculties of reason and memory and that courts ought to discount their testimony as well as that of the blind, handicapped, lunatics, and children" (Haqqani, 2005, p.144). This religious government regime benefited most the tribal and feudal lords of Baluchistan and NWFP (North West Frontier Province) who were already

enjoying authority and power imparted by the British colonial rule as Shaheed (1991) explains:

To control and administer large territories under their rule, without deploying large numbers of British, the British Raj strengthened the feudal and/or tribal system in the rural areas by making land alienable and granting feudal and tribal leaders absolute ownership [power]. In turn this increased the over-all hold of the feudal ideology in the rural areas, which incorporated the most rigid forms of purdah and the social control of women. (Shaheed, 1991, p.152)

Thus, over the years, the gradually evolving Pakistani society became harsher in its treatment of women, as Shamsie asserts, “As lawlessness spread, ancient tribal customs were confused with religion, the killing of women in the name of honour increased, and a parallel system of justice, village ‘jirga’<sup>2</sup> ensured further victimisation” (Shamsie, 2005, p. xix). It is this policing and guarding of women’s bodies by men in politics and by feudal and tribal lords, in the name of religion, that makes the present Pakistani society patriarchal.

Given the multicultural and linguistic diversity of Pakistan, women across the country, however, found themselves under different measures of patriarchy that hindered, and continues till this day, to prevent women’s equal participation in public spheres. In other words, a punjabi woman from the Punjab province may find it slightly easier to gain basic education or perhaps take up a profession as compared to a woman from the NWFP or Baluchistan province for which the concept of school and education is still considered a taboo. It is this complexity of defining Pakistani women in their particular context, along with their resistance of patriarchal structures aimed at controlling her body and sexuality, that remains the central argument of this thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> Village Jirga is a small gathering of influential people in the village. The purpose of this gathering is to resolve disputes among villagers. The word Jirga is of Pashtun origin. Mostly a Jirga is called to punish women accused of immoral behaviour.

The diversity that contributes to the image of Pakistani women has been addressed by Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed (1987) in their book *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back*:

Depending on her geographical location, a Pakistani woman can find herself in a tribal, urban and rural environment. She can be a highly qualified and self-confident professional or a self-effacing peasant toiling alongside her men folk; she can lead a highly cloistered life...or she can be a central figure of authority in the limited circles of influential women. The Pakistani woman then is a myriad creature for whom a single image does not suffice. To talk of Pakistani women is in fact to talk of groups of women, of clusters of similarity in a disparate reality. (Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987, p.21)

Mumtaz and Shaheed's crucial endeavour highlights the interplay of a range of diverse factors, linguistic, cultural and religious that defines Pakistani women. They focus closely on how women in different positions are subjected to exploitation and oppression. They also outline the gradual rise of feminist movements across the country, since its creation in 1947 to just after Zia's military regime. Mumtaz and Shaheed's work was a crucial requirement of the time as it provided a strong reaction against the plights of women caused by Zia's political policies centred on women. Since then Pakistani English literature has become an effective medium of protest on both political and social levels. Women's issues, including the feudal patriarchal exploitation of women, became increasingly popular amongst novelists as Muhammad Asim Siddiqui (2011) notes, "Almost all Pakistani novelists have dealt with the feudal class in their works. The feudal class also knows how to use religion to its advantage, even when religion does not have a very strong basis in the lives of people it has been used by the feudal class to maintain its power and position" (Siddiqui, 2011, p.186).

Works of Anglophone writers, both male and female, continue to provide much needed and valued contributions to the emerging field of Pakistani literature. Female writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Monica Ali, Feryal Ali Ghuhar, Sara Suleri, Kamila Shamsie, Uzma Aslam Khan and Qaisra Shahraz along with their male counterparts such as Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Hanif Kureshi, Tariq Ali, Zulfiqar Ghose and Mohammad Hanif are some of the main writers of Pakistani English fiction. These writers, writing from both

inside and outside of their country of birth (Pakistan), have gained international recognition. Born in Pakistan, some of these writers now live abroad. Because of this their writing may be looked upon as an attempt to keep hold of their 'belongingness' to Pakistan and could also be read as a keen desire to identify with and represent the country. Muneeza Shamsie (2008) in her edited anthology *And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women* points out the wider scope Pakistani literature has, and continues to acquire, with migrants settling into the English speaking world:

The fanning out of migrants into the English-speaking diasporas, accompanied by the facility of travel and the growth of the electronic media, has provided an impetus to Pakistani English literature; it reaches a broad Anglophone audience. However, in Pakistan it has a much smaller readership than indigenous languages and literatures which are more widely spoken and read. Thus, Pakistani women who enjoy English as a creative language live between the East and the West, literally or figuratively, and have had to struggle to be heard. They write from the extreme edges of both English and Pakistani literature. (Shamsie, 2008, p.1)

The greater scope of Pakistani English literature and its international exposure continues to encourage many young writers from both within and outside Pakistan. Pakistani English literature is now finding a much wider readership within Pakistan as English language is increasingly becoming a popular medium of communication.

Anglophone writers have dealt with many themes through their writings addressing a wide range of issues. Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* deals with the journey of the protagonist Hiroko Tanaka, a school teacher in Nagasaki. Shamsie's Hiroko is a woman who travels across countries from Japan to India then to Pakistan and America in search of a home after the US bombing of Nagasaki in 1945. *Burnt Shadows* reveals the tale of a woman in pursuit of her identity. Shamsie shows the fluid and dynamic nature of the identity of an individual which transcends across boundaries of time and space. Another striking feature of the novel is the burnt bird shapes on her back left by the bomb explosion. Shamsie describes how a woman's body, like her life, is scarred amidst the wars fought by men. Another female Pakistani writer Sara Suleri's autobiographical novel *Meatless Days* (1989) is a critique of the subordinated position of women within Pakistani

society. Shamsie and Suleri's novels are based in the context of larger political and religious discourses at both national and international level. However, the specific novels chosen for this research - Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988), *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) and Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman* (2001) and *Typhoon* (2003) - deal with women and their domestic and social lives within Pakistani society.

A distinguishing feature of Sidhwa and Shahraz's fiction, which makes their novels most suitable for this research, from the other choices available, is their central focus on the domestic lives of women. Their novels are firmly grounded in the lived experiences of women as their bodies assume the central position in their struggle of self-assertion. Both Sidhwa and Shahraz's female characters find their bodies to be sites of struggle which men try to control sexually, physically and emotionally. Both writers situate their female characters in resistance against culturally constructed norms that aim to control their bodies and sexually objectify them as symbols of male honour. Their work reflects a male obsession with female body in a society where women's position, their roles, their dress, and their behaviour are decided by men, at both national and domestic levels. This commonality in Sidhwa and Shahraz's fiction enables a feminist reading against the larger patriarchal Pakistani society.

Sidhwa has made a huge contribution to the opus of Pakistani English literature. As a woman living in a patriarchal society, Sidhwa defied the traditional roles assigned to women and began to write about the position of women in her society. At the time when Sidhwa decided to become a novelist during the 1970s, there were hardly any women writing English fiction in Pakistan. The situation across the border however, was, markedly different as Indian fiction in English had already established a literary genre with many writers such as Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Salman Rushdie. Therefore, Sidhwa is considered as one of the pioneers of Pakistani fiction in English. Shahraz, on the other hand, holds her place as an emerging writer in this area. Sidhwa moved to America in 1983 with her husband and now lives in Houston, Texas. Living in America has been a liberating experience for Sidhwa but her love for her country of birth especially her city Lahore and her Punjabi identity is strongly felt by her. In her interview with Bachi Karkaria she claims, "I am a Parsee first, then a Pakistani, specifically a Punjabi. I am a

woman simply by gender. I don't feel American at all. My consolidated 3 P identity has enriched my writing" (Cited in Singh, 2005, p.6). Sidhwa's experience of living both in Pakistan and America has also enriched her understanding of social issues concerning Pakistani women in both societies. For example, her portrayal of sexual repression in Pakistani society works as the backdrop in most of her novels. Sidhwa's observation of this social attitude towards sexual matters in Pakistani society stems from her experience of living in the USA, a country which allows comparatively greater freedom in sexual matters.

Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* and *The Pakistani Bride* explore some of these social issues such as marriage, sexual commodification and victimisation of women in Pakistani society. This makes these novels best suited to my research as in her later novel, *An American Brat*, her focus shifts to the cultural clash and experience of Pakistani women within diaspora. With regard to her writings, Singh points out that Sidhwa's female characters in their fictional world exhibit similar characteristics to Sidhwa in real life, "rebellion is not in their nature. They try to cope with the parental, societal and cultural pressures in their life as much as they can but when they find their very life and identity are in danger they throw off all shackles and fight with full force to foil the foul attempts of their adversary" (Singh, 2005, p.22). Furthermore, Sidhwa being a Parsee by religion, keenly talks about her religious and cultural customs both praising and criticising in humorous style the lives of her Parsee characters, especially in her novel *The Crow Eaters*. However, being a woman, she pays close attention to the lives of women generally and within Pakistani society specifically. Her novels *Ice Candy Man* and specifically *The Pakistani Bride* deal with Pakistani Muslim characters. This feature of her writing links her with Qaisra Shahraz who specifically focuses on Pakistani Muslim women in both of her novels.

Shahraz was born in Pakistan but later migrated to the UK with her family. Shahraz, like Sidhwa, reflects a strong connection with her country of birth through her writings. She tackles the social repression of women living in Pakistan. Her writings also explore the lives of Pakistani Muslim women living in the West and issues relating to cultural identity. Her short stories, specifically *A Pair of Jeans*, highlight the clash of Muslim values within the context of Western culture. In an interview with Munira Siddiqui (2011) regarding the

promotion of the book *The Holy and the Unholy: Critical Essays on the Art and Craft of Qaisra Shahraz's fiction*, Muhammad Asim Siddiqui discusses Shahraz's diasporic identity, her feminist perspective and her attitude to patriarchy in Pakistani culture:

Pakistan never disappeared from Qaisra Shahraz's imaginative space. The diasporic identity has its own advantages...the abundance of experience Pakistani and Western...She redefines feminism for Pakistani society, call it Islamic feminism or Muslim feminism...Her target is the agrarian system, some oppressive customs in Sindh and the subversion of Islam to serve one's own interest. (Siddiqui, 2011, p.2)

Both of Shahraz's novels, *The Holy Woman* and *Typhoon*, are based in Pakistan and deal with the oppressive customs that victimise women. Both Sidhwa and Shahraz, as diasporic Pakistani writers, contribute towards defining and exploring the identity of women within Pakistani society. Shahraz's experience of living in the UK has also allowed her a certain advantage towards understanding the social concerns that women in Pakistan are facing. For instance, her observation of a sense of confusion and hostility towards the issue of veiling by Muslim women found in Western society led her to create Zari Bano, her main female character in *The Holy Woman*. Through this character's journey of choosing to veil and her gradual shift in freely embracing and adopting the practice of purdah, Shahraz aims to discard the Western notion of the veil being a symbol of oppression. So Sidhwa and Shahraz both use their diasporic experiences to analyse and present the position of women in Pakistani society through themes which are of great significance at both national and international levels.

Shahraz's work studied alongside Sidhwa's is quite significant to this research as Sidhwa explores the identity of Muslim women within Pakistani society from a non-Muslim point of view. Both Sidhwa and Shahraz reflect the struggle of women in claiming their space within the restrictive enclosures imposed on their lives. Their female characters battle through difficult times to emerge as confident women. I also include in my analysis a novel by a contemporary Urdu (Pakistani) female writer Umera Ahmad. Her novel *Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan* (2000) which translates as 'My self (female identity) is a speck (tiny particle) Undefined' proves crucial in summing up my discussions of Sidhwa and Shahraz's novels in important ways. First and foremost it allows me to draw a comparative parallel



of the feminist struggle of Pakistani female writers writing in English with their Urdu counterpart. Secondly, it allows this study a broader scope towards Pakistani feminist writings as Urdu writers both male and female are an indispensable part of the literary canvas in general and the feminist literary canvas in particular. Lastly, I find that Ahmad's approach to some of the issues raised by Sidhwa and specifically Shahraz provides possible solutions or alternative scenarios.

Pakistani fiction in English has been more focused on political issues at both the national and international levels especially after the recent rise of interest in Islam and Muslims in the wake of 9/11. However as far as Shahraz's works are concerned, her writings cannot be strictly classed as political as she only makes slight evasive hints at the underlying political struggles and her major concern remains the social conflicts at more or less domestic levels that shape the everyday lives of her characters. Siddiqui (2011) in his chapter, 'The Political or the Social: Qaisra Shahraz and the Present Pakistani Writings in English' voices a similar thought. Regarding Shahraz's writings he adds that:

Though the political questions are only hinted at by Qaisra Shahraz, her novels remain rooted in its social context. As such it can also qualify as a Muslim social novel with the elements of romance thrown in. This kind of fiction has a more successful counterpart in popular Urdu literature. There are not many novels in English that can qualify as Muslim socials...she earns the distinction of introducing a new genre of fiction in English. (Siddiqui, 2011, pp.194-195)

Shahraz's writing with its main focus on the social issues of lives of women within Pakistani society is a major contribution. It indicates the need for Pakistani English fiction to address social concerns of women's lives. In the light of this discussion, Umera Ahmad's writing, which deals with women's education, marriage, sexuality and the social pressures that women face within Pakistani society, provides an important conceptual link that binds both Shahraz and Ahmad. Both Shahraz and Ahmad's characters remain the victims of an unjust society where male members of their family exploit religious values to gain secular and materialistic gains.

Therefore, my thesis traces and highlights the struggle of female figures in search of their identity against the man-made social taboos which, like demons, have possessed women in the name of culture and religion. Grappling with a range of social and cultural issues, the female figures from across the chosen works present different views on how female sexuality and bodies become central in the perusal of their female identity. Through sexual awakening, sexual victimisation (rape, forced marriage) and sexual discrimination Sidhwa, Shahrzad and Ahmad's women learn of the gendered oppression that works through their bodies. My research explores the works of these writers as I highlight both the violent and subtle ways in which patriarchy limits and defines the lives of women in Pakistani society. Sidhwa highlights the victimisation of women due to the chaotic political settings and social unrest surrounding the pre-partitioned and post-partitioned Pakistan. Shahrzad and Ahmad, on the other hand, point out the institutionalised exploitation of women which continues to oppress women long after the political upheaval fades away.

The following section explains the theoretical framework of my thesis which draws contributions from feminist cultural perspectives. In addition, a close reading of the chosen texts using literary critical analysis allows me to highlight the major themes across the novels. I use both western feminist and literary critics such as Rita Felski, Pam Morris, and Elaine Showalter alongside Muslim feminists like Fatima Mernissi, Miriam Cooke and Margot Badran. I also draw upon the theoretical contributions of Post-colonial critics such as Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It is crucial to draw insights from these three perspectives to better contextualise the identity of Pakistani women. Pakistan, a post-colonial nation, has been a former British colony and therefore still retains the influences of Western culture. However, Islam is the dominant religion and the basic governing principle therefore feminists in Pakistan have been negotiating the identity of Pakistani women at the intersecting lines of both secular and Muslim feminism.

Feminist critics and writers from Western Second Wave feminism lend important contributions to the discussions of Pakistani literature. This period in British history broadened the scope of feminist explorations. It also opened new areas of discussion

regarding sexuality, family, and marriage. The major focus of this feminist awakening was to free the female body from the patriarchal grip by allowing women more control over their bodies and sexuality. The literary critics, writers and novelist of this era such as Simone De Beauvoir and Betty Friedan also played a crucial part in criticising the subordinated position relegated to women. The theoretical insights and approaches formulated by the critics and writers of this era of Western feminism can still be applied to analyse the position of women within contemporary Pakistani society.

As women in the West were making a huge progress in carving out a considerably better position for themselves in their societies, South Asian women especially Pakistani were also striving for their rights. Daughters of the emerging post-colonial nation, the Pakistani women, were faced with many challenges. As Pakistan is an Islamic country, founded upon the basis of Islamic ideology, any association with Western feminist ideas was/still continues to be a challenging concept to defend. Feminist ideas, calling for equality for women, were considered Western inspirations and easily dismissed as anti-Islamic, misleading and encouraging women to abandon their domestic duties. However, the universality of human rights, opposition to patriarchy, male domination and above all the aspirations of women to assert more control over their bodies and sexuality provided a common ground for both western and non-western feminists. Pakistani women found their bodies as the battle ground upon which the religiously motivated and misogynist government regime of Zia-ul-Haq launched the gender war. They found themselves disadvantaged on many grounds. The nearly non-existent difference between rape and adultery many times rendered women helpless. Whereas women in the West celebrated a greater autonomy and control over their bodies through gaining rights of contraception, abortion, legalised divorce procedures etc, women in Pakistan were mourning the political confinement of their bodies within man-made rules to serve male selfish interests.

With the rise of Second Wave of feminist movements in the Western world, in the 70s, feminist struggles also gained momentum within South Asia. In other words, the emergence of global feminist activist movements galvanised Muslim women in many parts of the world. In the case of Pakistan, the subsequent formation of Women's Action

Forum in 1981 by Pakistani women provided a platform for women to protest against oppressive regimes centred on the female body and sexuality. On literary grounds, Pakistani writers travelling across countries, influenced by the relatively greater freedom women enjoy in the west, began to write about the plight of Pakistani women. Western literature, feminist in approach, inspired many young Pakistani readers who then took up the task of writing. Bapsi Sidhwa is one glaring example who, in her childhood, read extensively the works by British authors. Later, writers such as Kamila Shamsie, Sara Suleri and Qaisra Shahraz, inspired by Western feminist literature, began to write about Pakistan and the status of women within Pakistani society.

Western theoretical perspectives regarding the cultural positioning and importance regarding the female body and sexuality have continued to develop. Women in the West have fought to challenge institutionalised control over the female body. Works of early Feminist theorists and writers such as, Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone De Beauvoir and Betty Friedan were explored and built on by critics and writers such as Susan Bordo, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler. These theorists among many others have provided their insights to expand and develop the scholarship on issues relating to the female body, sex and gender. These discussions emerged in order to understand, highlight and explore the importance and position of bodies and sexuality (especially female) within cultural, religious and philosophical discourses. I will draw upon some of the theoretical concepts and ideas argued by these theorists as a base to establish the understanding of the social and cultural significance of the female body within the Western feminist framework. According to Rosi Braidotti (1994):

In the feminist framework, the primary site of location is the body. The subject is not an abstract entity, but rather a material embodied one. The body is not a natural thing; on the contrary, it is a culturally coded socialised entity. Far from being an essential notion, it is the site of intersection of the biological, the social and the linguistic, that is, of language as the fundamental symbolic system of a culture. Feminist theories of sexual difference have assimilated the insight of mainstream theories of subjectivity to develop a new form of 'corporeal materialism' that defines the body as an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting forces where multiple codes are inscribed. (Braidotti, 1994, p.238)

Katie Conboy (1997) et al in their edition *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* similarly highlight the social significance of women's bodies:

Indeed there is a tension between women's lived bodily experiences and the cultural meaning inscribed on the female body that always mediate those experiences. Historically women have been determined by their bodies: their individual awakenings and actions their pleasure and their pain compete with representations of the female body in larger social frameworks. (Conboy et al, 1997, p.1)

Susan Bordo (1993) in her book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* analyses the effects of popular culture through obsessive body practices, eating habits and certain disorders in shaping the female body as, "a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control from foot binding and corseting to rape and battering to compulsory heterosexuality" (Bordo, 1993, p.21). Elizabeth Grosz (1995) identifies two main approaches used to theorise the body by Western theorists. She refers to the first approach as, "inscriptive which conceives the body as a surface on which social law, morality and values are inscribed; the second 'lived body' refers largely to the lived experiences of the body, the body's internal or psychic inscription" (Grosz, 1995, p.33). I find that both approaches provide insights to frame the analysis of the female bodies regarding sexuality in my thesis. The female characters discussed in this thesis find their bodies as "inscriptive surfaces...marked, scarred, transformed, and written upon or constructed by the various regimes of institutional, discursive, and nondiscursive power as a particular kind of body" (Grosz, 1995, p.33). However, as the second approach suggests, some of these characters especially those found in the works of Shahraz, as will be discussed in chapter on *The Holy Woman*, demonstrate the 'lived body' approach as their bodies acquire meaning through the lived experiences in their daily lives.

Here it becomes pertinent to bring Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity' into discussion. In *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of Sex* she explores the issues regarding the body and the social construction of gender through the lived body approach. She uses the concept of performance/performativity to explain the construction of gender as an act constantly repeated:

Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularised and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that “performance” is not a singular “act” or event but a ritualised production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism. (Butler, 1993, p.95)

Thus, gender becomes something that one ‘does’ or something that can be done. Gill Jagger (2008) elaborates on Butler’s concept that, “gender is a kind of enforced cultural performance, compelled by compulsory hetero-sexuality, and that, as such, it is performative. Rather than expressing some inner core or pre-given identity, the performance of gender produces the illusion of such a core or essence” (Jagger, 2008, p.21). Certain male and female characters in the novels at various points perform their gender roles, both consciously and unconsciously, within social constraints to conform to socially approved norms. Butler’s account of the performativity of gender allows a better understanding of how and why men and women function and behave within patriarchal societies where heterosexuality prevails as a norm.

Insights from the works of Western Feminist theorists are increasingly used to frame the analysis of women, bodies, sex and gender by South Asian feminist writers. These concepts can explain the continued subordination of women within patriarchal societies, as portrayed in literature, where women are identified with their bodies and considered capable of only biological functioning and devoid of intellectual abilities. Elaine Showalter, a prominent American feminist theorist and literary critic, in her essay ‘Feminist criticism in the wildernesses’ points out two modes of feminist criticism, the first mode deals with feminist as a reader and the second with women as a writer, named ‘feminist critique’ and ‘gynocritics’ respectively (Showalter, 1981, p.185). Showalter believes in the importance of a feminist critique as it exposes the misrepresentation of women in literature but she also points out the need to take women’s writing as the primary source of investigation. This shift in focus has been found in Pakistani English literature. As women writers continue to grow in number, feminists have increasingly taken up their texts to investigate the feminine experience through their writings. As

Neluka Silva (2003), regarding the role of writing centred on female body in Pakistani society, asserts:

Writing about the body, breaking down its taboos, and soliciting individual freedom and self-realisation by women, for women, has a clear political imperative within a landscape of religio-social repression and patriarchal authority, since the body is simultaneously a surface on which social law, morality values, and lived experiences are inscribed. Meanings are carved into and out of bodies. (Silva, 2003, p.34)

Moreover, to explain the difference of women's writing Showalter highlights four models that theories of women's writing make use of: as biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural. As the names suggest, these models highlight different perspectives of feminist criticism as rooted in biology, language, female psyche and culture. She also makes clear that these models not only overlap but also contribute to one another (Showalter, 1981, p.187). The biological perspective looks at the body as a source of imagery in feminist writing, the linguistic theories question the relationship of language and women, their use of language, their being able to create new languages of their own and their level of comfort with language which have, so far, been male centred. The psychoanalytic perspective describes the difference as being located in the author's psyche and finally the cultural model draws attention to the cultural environment and how it informs women about their position in society. Showalter believes that a theory based in the cultural model would better explain the difference of women's writing:

Indeed, a theory of culture incorporates ideas about the women's body, language and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social context in which they occur. The way women conceptualise their bodies and their sexual and reproductive functions are intricately linked to their cultural environment. (Showalter, 1981, p.197)

The four theoretical frameworks described by Showalter all contribute in important ways in determining and understanding the scope, breadth, importance and position of women's writing. However, I believe that the cultural model remains the major

framework that allows me to expand and explore the writings of my chosen Pakistani female writers. In the words of Showalter:

A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race, nationality, and history determinants are as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space. (Showalter, 1981, p.197)

South Asian, specifically Pakistani feminist fiction is shaped by a range of intersecting factors of not only biological, but linguistic, psychological and most importantly cultural nature. Pakistani women preoccupied by their bodily functions are further restricted by being denied any form of linguistic freedom. This is made worse through male hegemony over religious discourse that legitimises their patriarchal oppression over women's bodies and sexualities.

The male hegemony over the female body in Pakistan is a deep rooted and complex phenomenon. The female body is not only policed and appropriated at national level through dress code and behaviour but also in terms of its biological functions. Silva (2003) argues that, "tropes such as 'mother or daughter of the nation' illustrate how a woman's reproductive function and body are instrumentalised in the interests of the state so that reproductive sexuality is admitted along homogeneous national or ethnic lines" (Silva, 2003, p.38). In other words, women are considered responsible for producing 'sons of the nation' by birthing male children which is a matter of pride, as Silva notes, "men are conferred with society's esteem, and the womb is valorised when it produces sons" (Silva, 2003, p.39). Unsurprisingly, the birth of a girl child then becomes a matter of shame and failure. Thus a woman is denied the pleasures of her reproductive ability and is thrown into an emotional turmoil with her body.

This preoccupation of the female figure with her body is further exploited in the androcentric male world, as Nilufer E. Bharucha (1998) in her article 'Inhabiting Enclosures and Creating Spaces: The Worlds of Women in Indian Literature in English' further explains:



The female space is biologically recessed. The enclosure of the womb affords protection to the growing foetus and is therefore a positive factor. An androcentric world however has extended the analogy of biological female inwardness to create a feminine reductiveness. This has turned a biological virtue into a societal and cultural handicap. The male world after having imposed this limitation onto women, has celebrated it in dance and song. (Bharucha, 1998, p.93)

Thus female reproductive ability is socially and culturally moulded into a hindrance for women and has been used to subordinate them. Women however continue to challenge this perception which at times proves to be a difficult process, especially for women within Indian and Pakistani societies. As Bharucha points out, “given the strength of the androcentric world, acquired through the millennia of oppression and legitimisation of male logos, female discourse is not always successful in breaking out of the enclosures assigned to it” (Bharucha, 1998, p.93). The female characters discussed in the works of the chosen authors similarly inhabit, literally and metaphorically, male defined worlds which limit their lives in more than one way. Their struggle to break out of these confines, both literal and metaphorical, remains the pivotal point of concern throughout the novels. Whether it is the physical break-out of these confines, as displayed by Zaitoon in *The Pakistani Bride* or the metaphorical break from the unjust cultural customs, as in the case of Zari Bano in *The Holy Woman*, the female figures in their own capacity display the ability to resist and challenge the male defined enclosures.

Culturally and linguistically diverse and divided, confined within the androcentric male world, Pakistani women are further exploited as they find their bodies the site of emotional, physical and physiological conflict upon which their fate is ultimately decided. For example, Ayah and Lenny’s body in *Ice Candy Man* are symbolic sites upon which the migrating religious communities inscribe their farewell messages. Lenny’s body similarly, crippled and disabled remains the most prominent feature of the novel as it was her abnormal (polio-stricken) body that allowed Lenny to live among the adults, delving into the mysterious world of grownups. Similarly, Zaitoon, the bride taken to the mountains to be married by her father in *The Pakistani Bride* finds her body a site of physical and sexual abuse by her husband Sakhi. She is dependent on her ‘womb’ to produce a child

so that she may travel back to the plains to see her father. Zari Bano in *The Holy Woman* too enters into a strange relationship with her body as she is denied the right to marriage and forced to become a Holy Woman. Similarly, in *Typhoon*, Kaneez feels her body as a site permanently marked by the shame of being raped. Her body therefore becomes trapped in 'time' as she is unable to wash away her guilt and shame with the numerous baths she obsessively takes each day. Naghmana too suffers the insults of being labelled a 'whore' and a fallen woman, a witch and a 'man-eater' mainly due to her adorned, exposed and beautiful body that causes havoc in the otherwise peaceful and naïve village of Siraj Din. Shahraz further introduces us to other female characters that remain focused and troubled by their bodies, like the thirty- seven year old Jamila afraid and ashamed of her bulging, pregnant body which she had tirelessly attempted to empty out.

These various women are caught between the desire to assert their control over their bodies and cultural expectations. Torn between the conflict of duty and self-fulfilment these women find their bodies to be the battle ground upon which traditional values and modernity comes to clash. As Silva (2003) argues, "the boundaries between religion, tradition, and culture are collapsed and, for women, all three are prescriptive forces" (Silva, 2003, p.43). Sidhwa, Shahraz and Ahmed portray a female figure caught between the clashes of these 'prescriptive forces' that dominate her body. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999), in her essay 'Can The Subaltern Speak?' claims:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration of the "third-world-woman" caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development. (Spivak, 1999, p.304)

In addition, the Pakistani Muslim women writers are faced with the challenges of defending and defining their religious identity. They continue to challenge the western stereotypes of oppressed Muslim women by attempting to write and thereby assert the intellectual capability of Muslim women. They create characters that are willing to and capable of recognising and challenging oppressive customs that hinder their progress. These present day writers are trying, in all their capacity, to challenge the stereotypical

presentations of the Third World woman. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), a prominent post-colonial feminist theorist, in her essay 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse' presents a detailed study of Western feminist writings with regards to the representation of Third World women. She argues and criticises the attempt, in Western feminist writings, to:

Discursively colonise the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular "Third World woman" - an image which appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorising signature of Western humanist discourse. (Mohanty, 2003, p.19)

Mohanty is of the view that Third World women should not be grouped or presented as a monolithic entity and a group bound merely by shared dependencies and victims of male violence. She stresses the importance of taking into account the different factors, historical, geographical and religious, behind the oppression of Third World Women. Mohanty's stance is useful to my research as the image of Pakistani women, which I am arguing for in my thesis, is also shaped by a range of contributing factors. In other words, for a woman in Pakistani society, oppression is rooted in diverse historical, geographical and even religious factors. Western feminist inspirations have contributed a great deal to the exploration of the position of South Asian women within their societies, but as Mohanty points out, one needs to be mindful of the simplistic application of such models.

As one of the possible solutions, Mohanty, in her book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonising Theory, Practicing Solidarity* envisions and proposes a transnational feminist model. This model stresses feminist solidarity and is aware of the importance of borders as well as willing and learning to transcend them (Mohanty, 2003, p.2). Commenting on her personal experience of living and growing in post independent India, which introduced her to the concepts of borders and boundaries, Mohanty explains, "The presence of borders in my life has been both exclusionary and enabling, and I strive to envision a critically transnational (internationalist) feminist praxis moving through borders" (Mohanty, 2003, p.2). This idea of a transnational, anti-racist, feminist framework built on solidarity echoes in Sidhwa, Shahraz and Ahmed's feminist stance

through their writings. Both Sidhwa and Shahraz, as diasporic writers through their female characters, negotiate the identity of Pakistani women within a transnational and antiracist framework. For example, Shahraz's approach towards the issue of veiling in *The Holy Woman* highlights her attempt to build a better understanding of this controversial issue. In so doing she encourages an antiracist and tolerant attitude towards Third World Muslim women with regard to the issue of veiling.

Muslim feminists across the globe have been debating on the issues, position and scope of feminism within Islam. Miriam Cooke (2001), in her book *Women Claim Islam*, points out that Muslim women all over the world and specifically within the Arab world have become more aware of the official preoccupation with women's bodies by male religious authorities which has galvanised the Muslim women into action. According to her, the advancements in information technology have allowed a wider networking amongst Muslim women who are questioning the parameters of gender roles within Islam (Cooke, 2001, p. vii-xvii). Furthermore, Cooke draws out a broader definition of feminism:

Feminism is much more than an ideology deriving organised political movements...It is an attitude, a frame of mind that highlights the role of gender in understanding the organisation of society. Feminism provides analytical tools for accessing how expectations for men's and women's behaviour have led to unjust situations, particularly but not necessarily only for women. Feminism involves political and intellectual awareness of gender discrimination and a rejection of behaviours furthering such discrimination. (Cooke, 2001, p.viii)

Thus, Cooke does not feel the need to search for an alternative word for feminism that Muslim women should use to name their efforts and actions intended for the betterment of women within Islam. Instead she extends the notion of feminism to include the efforts of Muslim women and thereby overcomes its Western association. I agree with Cooke's view and work with this definition of feminism to explore how female characters in my chosen novels deal with injustice imposed on them, under the guise of cultural traditions and religion.

Cooke, along with other Muslim feminist scholars such as Margot Badran, has captured the long struggle of Muslim women writing, both within the Arab world and outside, to challenge the Western presumption of the absence of feminism in Islam. These efforts have proved fruitful against the Western use of, “the trope of oppressed Muslim Woman, a set piece in Orientalist discourse, displaying a feigned concern for “her” plight, in order to justify colonial and neo-colonial incursions into Muslim societies” (Badran, 2009, p.1). Shahraz, as a Muslim woman writer living in the West, engages with the issue of feminism in Islam as most of her female characters are seen to be questioning their position within the religious frameworks. Her characters often draw on text from the Quran to argue their stance when they feel they are being wronged by their men.

The following section highlights the importance of writing for women as a medium to articulate their experiences, hardships and understanding of their position within their society. Feminist fiction, as well as feminist reading of fiction by women, allows for a better understanding of the position relegated to women. The female fiction written from a feminist perspective attempts to capture and debate the multiple aspects of female identity and thereby remains an important site of investigation as Rita Felski (2003) writes:

The deep rooted alienation of the female psyche in turn leaves its marks in women’s writing, which provides a key to the truth of female experience. At first glance, this writing may appear to condone and even to endorse traditional views about men and women. But read correctly, it will yield compelling evidence of the author’s struggle to find a real self behind the ‘copy selves’ of patriarchal culture. The true meaning of women’s writing lies beneath the surface, in covert messages and submerged clues. Because this meaning is socially unacceptable and even subversive, it is buried deep within the text. (Felski, 2003, p.69)

Sidhwa, Shahraz and Ahmad create certain female characters through which they explore social, political and cultural issues. The imagined lives of their female figures allow these authors to experiment with all the possibilities that may not be possible in the real world. The authors avail themselves of the liberty of the literary space to create situations that not only reflect the reality of the lives of women but also offer solutions that are mutually acceptable by both genders in the context of their social settings. Their

writings suggest that society is ultimately male-centred and the female often has to struggle to claim her identity as an individual. This struggle mostly requires a sacrifice of female desires, emotions and often lives. The world that my chosen writers portray in their writings is predominantly a patriarchal world encompassing the symbolic as well the literal confinements of the female figure; as Felski (2003) comments:

The resoundingly patriarchal world of literature echoes the images of enclosure and the literal and symbolic confinement of the female figures...imprisoned in male houses, women are also locked inside the forbidding edifice of a masculine culture. Images of enclosure carry particular resonance for the female author; they remind her of her own crushing sense of paralysis in the face of an alien and alienating tradition. (Felski, 2003, p.68)

Sidhwa, Shahrzad and Ahmad, through their writings, explore this symbolic and literal confinement of the female figure and urge their female figures to resist, challenge and break free from these confines. Their feminist stance speaks of their inherent desire to create a literary space where they negotiate their ideals of femininity. As Benet (2008) asserts:

The feminisation of discourse has given women an authoritative voice and authenticity. Besides, it has helped them to deterritorialize men and their theories to create a literary space of their own. Feminist writing has created a feeling of sisterhood and collective identity as they recognise the female body as the site of bacchanalian delights and textual politics. (Benet, 2008, p.133)

Writings by women across cultures created a literary tradition that enabled women to speak about their experiences. Women started to make public their own understandings of the world they lived in and question the roles imposed on them. Pam Morris (1993) asserts:

Finding their own emotions, circumstances, frustrations and desires shared into literary form gave (and continues to give) many women, some for the first time a sense that their own existence was meaningful, that their view of things was valid and intelligent, that their suffering was imposed and unnecessary, and a belief in women's collective strength to resist and remake their own lives. Writing by women can tell

the story of the aspects of women's lives that have been erased, ignored, demeaned and mystified and even idealised. (Morris, 1993, p. 60)

Further, while commenting on a passage from a novel *Daughter of Earth* (1929), Morris in terms of women authors, points out how the author attempts to create, highlight and celebrate the sense of unity expressed by the female characters through shared works, pain and dreams. She goes on to explain that:

Perhaps the most persistent positive feature of women's writing is its recognition of the bonds of friendship, loyalty and love existing between women... This strongly contests the many male authored texts that have presented relationships between women primarily in form of sexual rivalry and betrayal. The sense of solidarity with other women writers has led many woman writers to feel the need to bear witness, to use their work deliberately to testify to and protest against oppression and suffering inflicted on women by particularly brutal regimes and events. (Morris, 1993, p.62)

South Asian women writers - Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani - have also strived to develop a literary tradition which pays close attention to women and their issues in domestic and private spheres. The quest for female identity remains the most prominent struggle that most of the writers aspire to achieve. For example, Shashi Deshpande, an Indian feminist novelist explores the struggle of the Indian women in search for their identity. As a feminist Deshpande recognises and aspires for the betterment of Indian women. She notes:

Women have been quite suppressed, quite oppressed...a large section of Indian women are even suffering today. We have women going about with ghunghat on their faces. And women who have no choice even to decide about having children. We have many people who still advocate 'Sati' who consider dowry a necessity, who count it a loss when a girl is born and a profit when a boy is born. It is this abysmal difference I want to do away with as a feminist. (Cited in Swain, 2005, p.40)

Similarly, images of the Indian women offered by writers like Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Uma Vasudev and Kamala Das deal with the 'search of identity' of the female figure, who finds herself shackled in the patriarchal structures. The Pakistani feminist writers too

joined their sisters across the border in the efforts to explore the female identity through their writings. As Kumari asserts, “a sense of identity is a perennial sustaining creative force in a writer” (Kumari, 2005, p.13). Sathupati Prasana Sree (2005) in *Indian Women Writing in English: New Perspectives* points out:

We need to remember that in writing, that is expressing themselves, in giving to the urge of self-expression, women have already flouted tradition in that they are doing what they are not supposed to be doing. When a woman writes she is turning her back on tradition. She is proclaiming herself, she is saying I will speak, I will say what I want to say. The very process of writing is a loud declaration of the self - something that tradition barred her from. (Sree, 2005, p.9)

Naomi Nkealah (2009) in her article ‘Contesting the Culture of Silence in Muslim Women’s Writing: Women, Sex and Marriage in Alifa Riffat’s Distant View of a Minaret’ points out how Muslim women have chosen the medium of writing to not only, “capture women’s strength and weaknesses, explore the challenges they face in society, articulate problems they encounter in the area of marriage, childrearing and employment but also to reveal their strategies of survival in difficult circumstances” (Nkealah, 2009, p.28). Nkealah further highlights how:

Notable writers such as Nawal el-Saadawi, Assia Djebar, Mariama Ba and so on have questioned social taboos pertaining to male/female relationships, and in particular the taboos are intended to regulate women’s behaviour, and effectively keep them within a private space that engenders subservience, complacency, obedience and benign acceptance of one’s lot in life. (Nkealah, 2009, p.28)

Nkealah highlights the significance of writing for women living in patriarchal societies where writing is considered a comparatively safer and effective medium of communication. This also applies for women in Pakistani society where speaking out can bring grave consequences. Therefore writing offers a relatively greater freedom to express themselves.

This feminist struggle through a literary medium has deep roots which originate from pre-partitioned Pakistan. Literary forms such as magazines and novels have been used



since the early 40's to 'educate' women. Some of the most popular literary magazines of that era include *Taleem-e-Niswan* (*Education of the Women*), *Tehzib-ul-Ikhlāq* (*Discipline and Manners*) and *Tahzib-e-Niswan* (*Discipline of Women*). These educational magazines addressed the issues of morality, religion, private lives of women and are specifically aimed at the obligations of a Muslim woman. However, Anwar Shaheen (2009) in his detailed study on the 'Patriarchal Education and its Emancipating Impact on the Muslim Women of India' highlights how the literature authored by the religious Ulema<sup>3</sup> only worked to confirm the inferior status of women by occasionally favouring education, yet within the confines of the purdah. Shaheen further explains that:

The fiction directed at the female readers was full of stereotypical characters reinforcing traditional roles and misconceptions about women. No bold, leading and daring characters were created, though it was possible. Consequently, the self-image of the [Muslim] woman could not improve. (Shaheen, 2009, p.36)

However, there are some important contributions to female-based Urdu texts by much acclaimed Urdu male writers such as Deputy Nazir Ahmad in regards to his novel *Mirat-ul-Uroos*, literally meaning 'Mirror of the Bride'. This novel explores the construction of a Muslim female identity, as a wife, mother and daughter. Within the sexually segregated domestic spheres, women, in this novel, were shown to play an effective role towards the creation of a stable, chaste and peaceful Muslim society. This image of a pious woman was presented in sharp contrast to lazy, illiterate and greedy women who not only create trouble for themselves but also for those around them. We come across similar characters in the novels discussed who with the passage of time have become the victims of decaying patriarchal, male constructed versions of piety such as Saba's mother-in-law (discussed in chapter 5) and are shown to victimise other (younger) women around them.

There has been a marked difference and shift in the portrayal and construction of female characters and the themes discussed through Pakistani literature with the passage of

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<sup>3</sup> Ulema are the scholars in the field of Islamic studies. To become Ulema one has to go through several years of training and in-depth study of the Quran and Hadees (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, P.B.U.H). Ulema occupy an important social, political and religious position within Pakistan and serve in many positions from members of the national assembly, leaders of Government opposition parties to lower hierarchal positions as carers of local mosques.

time. We come across more female characters in recent fiction by women writers who are questioning their position within society, challenging the traditional roles and (re)constructing their identities. This shift in focus can be better understood by referring to Elaine Showalter's three phases of literary development regarding early British women writers. In her book *A Literature Of Their Own* Showalter describes the first as the 'feminine phase' (1840-1880) during which women writers created their female characters in accordance with ambient male traditions. These writings rarely challenged the position of women within their society. The second 'feminist phase' (1880-1920) include women writers openly claiming and advocating for their rights. The third, 'female phase' (1920-1960) is regarded as a phase of 're-discovery' by women and women's text (Showalter, 1977). This shift or pattern of development in British women's literature can be applied to the works of my chosen writers to identify a similar pattern in the way female characters are created.

As Showalter explains, these phases can overlap and can even appear in the works of a single author (Showalter, 1977, p.11). Similarly, I do not mean to propose that my chosen authors are limited to a certain pattern. However, generally speaking Sidhwa's and Shahraz's characters can be said to fall under the first two phases of development. They are portrayed as victims of a range of male violence. However, they realise their subordination and strive to challenge their position within society. Ahmed's characters, on the other hand, can be placed under the third phase where Saba, her main character, sets out on a journey of self-discovery. Her struggle is no longer against a patriarchal male figure but against the societal norms and patriarchal structures that hinder her progress. The novel questions the oppressive cultural norms with open-ended answers. This allows the readers to formulate their own understandings and conclusions.

It is important to take these shifts into account as they reflect the social and cultural dynamics and their effect on the position of women in society as presented through the writings of my chosen authors. These writings allow the female figures to realise their stifling conditions and points out how their thinking has been moulded to accept male superiority. Therefore, the relationship between the woman writer and her text becomes

significant as the characters often bear a close association with the author. Judith Kegan Gardiner (1981) in her detailed essay on the female identity asserts that:

The author exercises magical control over her character, creating her from representations of herself and her ideals. Yet she must allow her text a limited autonomy. A character's taking on a life of its own can mean that the author shapes her character according to literary convention, social reality as well as according to projections of her representations of herself. The author judges how such a character would behave in the settings the author provides her...thus the author may define herself through the text while creating her female hero. (Gardiner, 1981, p.357)

The author therefore uses the text to construct the female identity for her female characters as well as to define herself, perhaps as an outlet for anger and frustrations or unfulfilled desires. In other words, the female figure and the author both seem to be going through the process of defining the self. Interestingly, Sidhwa and Shahraz's female characters, especially the main female figures, bear a close resemblance to their creators. Lenny in *Ice Candy Man* reflects Sidhwa's childhood. Sidhwa too, like Lenny, was polio-stricken and spent most of her childhood at home. Mitali Wong and Zia Hassan (2004) similarly, highlight how Sidhwa's novels reflect her personal endeavours and struggles:

In her own fashion, Sidhwa has had to fight her own battles for independence. Like Lenny, her young Parsi narrator in *Cracking India* (*Ice Candy Man*), she (Sidhwa) was a victim of polio and because of her gender she was denied formal schooling until she was fourteen. She was married at nineteen and became a mother soon after. Therefore she had to conceal her literary ambitions. These personal circumstances, this need to find an identity, led her to create characters that go through their journeys of initiation in search of a niche without the fiction becoming polemical. Her intent has always been to create women characters that speak for themselves...to create characters that begin as everyman figures, who in the quest of their identity, become icons and heroes and ultimately larger than life. (Wong and Hassan, 2004, pp.75-77)

Similarly, Zari Bano in *The Holy Woman* and Naghmana in *Typhoon* seem to represent Shahraz as both, like Shahraz, are educated, modern and urban women. Naghmana like

Shahraz is a lecturer and Zari Bano travels abroad for the purpose of education. Interestingly Ahmad's Saba is endowed with keen intellectual ability that reflects Ahmad's own love for knowledge and learning. Therefore the fiction produced by these Pakistani women can be said to serve a double purpose. It not only allows the author to express her desires, anxieties and worries but also to convey her disappointments and unique way of encouragement and hope for women.

This research thus aims to explore the complexities that surround the lives of women in Pakistani society. It exposes the patriarchal structures that hinder women's progress and insists on controlling them through sexual victimisation. My analysis highlights how religion has been misused by men at both national and domestic levels to confine female bodies within patriarchal enclosures in the name of cultural traditions. The different female characters discussed in the novels, demonstrate an awareness of these patriarchal restrictions and make attempts to resist their oppression. All of these female characters discussed across the novels, such as Ayah, Lenny, Zaitoon, Zari Bano, Naghmana, Kaneez and Saba experience emotional conflicts caught between duty and inner desires. Each of these characters experiences some sort of sexual victimisation such as rape, molestation, and violent or forced marriage. These fictional characters resist, in their own ways, to assert control over their bodies and lives in general. Therefore, this research also aims to provide a view of the possibilities of resistance of these patriarchal structures. Through the plight and resistance of these fictional characters, the authors experiment with the possible escape routes available for women in their day to day lives. Consequently, the sufferings and sorrows as well as the resistance and determination of the various female characters suggest ways for the betterment of women's position in Pakistani society.

Following is an overview of the division of the chapters within this thesis based on the novels and the major themes discussed in them. Chapter one of my thesis is based on Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* which traces the feminist awakening amidst the violent partition transfer of the 1947 divide between India and Pakistan. Sidhwa highlights the plight of women against the backdrop of sexual victimisation and an inherent feminine struggle which runs alongside the male victimisation under the guise of partition chaos. Sidhwa's

portrayal of Muslim characters remains crucial in this novel as it provides the novel with a linear temporal and spatial shift into the next novel *The Pakistani Bride* which is firmly rooted in the post-partitioned Pakistani society.

Chapter two looks at Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* which takes the discussion of female sexuality to a more domestic level combining the issues of veiling, marriage and women exchanged as tradable commodities amongst the tribal set up of a mountainous tribe of Pakistan. *The Pakistani Bride* offers a deeper analysis of male domination over female sexuality (body) especially through marriage as Zaitoon's marriage, her sexual awakening and consequent escape from the murderous tribe of her husband, highlights the biased and gender discriminating attitudes towards female sexuality.

Chapter three moves on to look at Shahraz's *The Holy Woman* which captures the plight of women submissively bound as their lives are ruled by their husbands and fathers. My analysis highlights how women are treated as symbols of male honour and feudal lords use cultural traditions to control, use and sacrifice women at will. As Habib Khan weds his daughter, to the Holy Quran to save his family land, Zari Bano finds it difficult to refuse. Thus, the chapter explores the interplay of social and cultural factors in an attempt to understand both the enforced and chosen subordination of women.

Chapter four is based on Shahraz's novel *Typhoon* which is a sequel to *The Holy Woman*. In *Typhoon* Shahraz delves deeply into the domestic spheres of village dwelling women. Shahraz explains how female sexuality is associated with shame and a mere accusation of infidelity scars the women for life. When Naghmana is accused of adultery, she is shamed by the village people and consequently faces divorce. Her predicaments do not end as years later she is summoned to forgive Siraj Din, who forces the divorce on her; Naghmana is unable to cope with the social exposure and shame and commits suicide. *Typhoon* highlights a strong female bodily association with shame which is endorsed by society, to control female sexuality.

Chapter five analyses Ahmad's *Meri Zaat-Zare-e-Benishan* which shows the little space a woman's voice is allowed in a man's world where it is easy to accuse a woman of immoral

behaviour such as pre-marital or extramarital sex but very difficult, and in most cases, impossible for women to prove their innocence. Saba faces an upheaval in her life as her mother-in-law accuses her of adultery and gets her divorced. She fails miserably to prove her innocence and suffers due to no fault of her own. Saba's resistance and determination to survive independently in a male dominated society shows how women are able to challenge male oppression.

The concluding chapter highlights the major themes that run across the works discussed and stresses that the female body remains largely a male-controlled territory in Pakistani society. In addition to this, female sexuality remains a major obsession which is repressed to maintain the male control over women. This chapter also provides a brief comparative analysis of the author's approaches towards their created female figures against the backdrop of a wider struggle presented through other literary works and real women in present Pakistani society. The thesis concludes on the note that Pakistani fiction in English and Urdu, by women writers, is a major contribution towards understanding the position of women in society and simultaneously a resistance towards patriarchal structures.

## Chapter no. 1

### A Feminist Awakening: Bodies, Identity and Female Sexuality in Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*

Puttar aurat da ki ai, au tan varti jaandi ai  
hamesha, bhavnve apne hon, bhanve paraye<sup>4</sup>

(Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p.45)

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*<sup>5</sup> (1998) deals with the suffering and survival of the various female figures against the backdrop of the political and social chaos caused by the 1947 partition between Indian and Pakistan. Within the larger political scenario of partition riots, Sidhwa skilfully embeds the gendered oppression of her female characters. Therefore, this novel provides ample scope for feminist analysis as it deals with various aspects of the lives of women. She begins her narrative around the time when the partition riots begin and ends after the creation of Pakistan. It brings together female figures from all ranges of age and size, from the young Lenny to the big bodied Godmother. Sidhwa exposes how female characters, young and old, are positioned within the gender specific roles through patriarchal biases centred on the female body. Sidhwa allows us to see how the female body remains the most important entity for the female figure in its ability and disability as it assigns meaning in the gendered world of Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*. We also witness how the female figures unite in sympathy and understanding to help and rescue each other as the mayhem of partition begins to violate the female bodies.

The partition refers to the division of the Indian subcontinent into two independent countries, India and Pakistan, in 1947. This political movement created an atmosphere of chaos as Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus began to migrate into their respective countries, Pakistan for Muslims and Hindustan (India) for Hindus and Sikhs. Other religious

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<sup>4</sup> "My child, what of a woman? It's her lot to be used, either by her own men or by the others."

<sup>5</sup> Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* is also known by its title *Cracking India*. Sidhwa was advised to change the title *Ice Candy Man* to *Cracking India* by her American publisher, as *Ice Candy Man* sounded misleading whereas *Cracking India* clearly conveyed the subject matter of the novel.

minorities, such as the Parsees, declared a neutral position and therefore did not migrate. This massive re-shuffling of people unleashed a tremendous amount of violence as between eight to ten million people migrated across the border (Didur, 2006, p.4). An estimate of 100,000 to 500,000 people died (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p.35). Unsurprisingly, women became the major victims of sexual violence. According to Urvashi Butalia (1998), “about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different than their own, and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion” (Butalia, 1998, p.3). The reasons behind this sexual victimisation of women were related to their cloistered lifestyle and precariously vulnerable positions within their families as well as religious and cultural communities.

Muslim, Hindu and Sikh women, in the Indian subcontinent, all lived under a similar patriarchal system. Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) in her article ‘Bargaining with Patriarchy’ names the patriarchal structures in regions such as, “the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran) and South and East Asia (specifically, India and China) as classic Patriarchy” (Kandiyoti, 1988, p.277). Kandiyoti explains that classic patriarchy is based on a patrilineal kinship system with senior men as the head of the extended households. Young girls are given in early marriage and are often the most vulnerable and subordinate to not only men of the family but older women as well. (Kandiyoti, 1988, p.277). The women in the Indian subcontinent, with certain variations and differences, lead protected and segregated lives in male subordination. For example, Anjali Datta (2006) speaking in the context of pre-partitioned Punjabi kinship structures, notes that, “A girl child was closely guarded by the members of the household...lest she attracted a man’s attention before her marriage. Thus, a woman was born in her father’s house and village (her peke) and it was here that she learnt to respect her father and idolise her brother as future guardians and protectors” (Datta, 2006, p.2230). Mattie Pennebaker (2000) points out how sexual segregation, through purdah and seclusion of women, across the Indian subcontinent, prevailed as a cultural norm amongst both Hindus and Muslims. (Pennebaker, 2000). Thus as the partition set in motion the mass transfer of the population men, from all communities, struggled to protect their women.



To abduct and rape the women of the opposing religious community became the easiest way to inflict the harshest punishment and revenge on the men of the opposing community. Thus partition was a conflict of religious identities fought on the battlefield of women's bodies. The sexual victimisation of women, during this time, was more than incidental and spontaneous. Women were consciously raped and disfigured as their breasts were cut and vaginas slashed and parcelled across the borders to declare the victory of one community of men and to shame the other. As Deepika Bahri (1999) rightly notes:

The punishment of the female body becomes an attack on the opponent through an elaborate inscription of women as the patrimonial body of state and religion. The fetishized status of woman as metonymic totem of national, cultural, religio-communal being and the emphasis on her purity are key elements in this gynocentered assault on the enemy. (Bahri, 1999, p.222)

Since women are seen as symbolic signifiers of their family honour, as well as religious and national honour, their protection became the greatest challenge by their men. Simultaneously, the violation of women, specifically of the opposing group, became the most sought after means of revenge. Consequently, as Menon and Bhasin (1998) in their book *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* document cases where women jumped into water-wells or set themselves ablaze to save their family honour. As women zealously volunteered to end their lives, there were cases of unwilling women who were emotionally appealed to by their families to commit suicide (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p.42). Yet they also note cases where families, stuck on the opposite side of the border, pawned their young women to buy a safe exit across the border (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p.48). As the settled patriarchal order of the Indian sub-continent was disturbed, due to partition riots, women's bodies were used by men, both of their own and of the opposing communities, in multiple ways to assuage their anger and frustrations. This mass sexual victimisation of women became a national concern as Menon and Bhasin (1998) further assert:

Women's sexuality, as it had been violated by abduction, transgressed by forced conversion and marriage and exploited by impermissible cohabitation and reproduction was at the centre of debates around national duty, honour and identity...[This] highlights, not only their

particular vulnerability at such times, but an overarching patriarchal consensus that emerges on how to dispose of the troublesome question of women's sexuality. (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p.20)

My analysis of Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* highlights how female sexuality remains a pivotal point in the gendered environment of Sidhwa's novel. The chapter shows how patriarchal structures determine the daily lives of Sidhwa's female characters. Focusing on Lenny, a young Parsi girl, and her Hindu Ayah, Lenny's caretaker, my analyses seeks to demonstrate how the partition riots exposed the patriarchal preoccupation with female body and sexuality as Ayah's much desired body is sexually victimised by the very men who befriended her before partition. Lenny's personal experience of sexual maturation and Ayah's sexual victimisation exposes Lenny to the harsh reality of being a woman in a patriarchal society. Whereas men try to and (as in Ayah's case succeed to some extent) to sexually objectify women, both Lenny and Ayah resist male oppression in order to assert their agency over their bodies.

Sidhwa does not show any clear division within *Ice Candy Man*, however, the pre-partition, partition and the post-partition phases are captured through certain incidents in the novel. The novel begins with the pre-partitioned Pakistan where Lenny and Ayah lead care free lives in a multicultural Lahore. Characters from different ethno-religious back grounds are shown to mingle on a daily basis. The partition phase soon sets in as Lenny begins to hear about the incidents of rioting. The partition gains momentum as Hindu and Sikh families begin to evacuate Lenny's vicinity and it reaches its peak with Ayah's abduction by a group of Muslim men. The novel ends with the new beginnings of post-partitioned Pakistan which Lenny captures through incidents like recovery of Ayah and the establishment of a recovery camp for abducted women.

This chapter explores how women in *Ice Candy Man* realise the biased and oppressive attitudes which condemn them to define their identity according to male whim and fancies. The chapter demonstrates that the violation of female bodies under the guise of partition riots led to the awakening of a feminist consciousness among the female characters. In other words, the female characters challenge the commodification, sexual violation and degradation of female bodies by choosing to gain and assert control over

their bodies and thereby succeed in establishing their identity as autonomous beings. The main female characters of the novel, Ayah and Lenny evolve as strong women capable of directing their own lives within male defined rules. I do not wish to propose that the female figures in *Ice Candy Man* choose to live independently of men or succeed in abolishing all biases that work to subordinate women. Certain female characters such as Papoo, Mini Anti and Hamida are unable to change their circumstances for the better. However, Ayah and Lenny's narrative exposes the significance of female body which men use for their political, social and religious agendas. In this chapter, Ayah and Lenny yearn to re-claim their bodies in order to gain an autonomous identity within the sexually repressive and gender biased social structures.

The 1947 partition of the Indian sub-continent has been captured by many novelists, both as the main event and as a background to other themes. For example, Khushwant Singh in his Novel *Train To Pakistan* (1956) captures partition and mass transfer in great detail. However, his account of partition is presented through a man's eye, Juggat Singh, the main character of the novel who lives through the partition riots and communal violence and dies a heroic death as he succeeds in saving the train crossing into Pakistan. On the other hand, Sidhwa in *Ice Candy Man* presents the partition as a background which at times merges with the lives of women as their bodies are caught between colonial, political and religious discourses. The central concern in *Ice Candy Man* remains the emergence of a feminist consciousness among women who resist patriarchal control over their bodies to assert their agency. Sidhwa exposes the patriarchal biases embedded in the fabric of social structure through the eyes of her main female figures Lenny and Ayah. In so doing, Sidhwa not only introduces a female account of partition violence but also captures a feminist awakening that runs through most of the female characters of the novel. It is this feminist awakening that I focus on throughout this chapter.

Feminist perspectives of *Ice Candy Man* have been explored in studies like Madhuparna Mitra's (2008) article 'Conceptualising Ayah's Abduction: Patterns of Violence Against Women in Sidhwa's *Cracking India*'. Focusing on specific female characters of the novel, like Papoo, Ayah, Lenny and her mother, Mitra highlights the sexual victimisation each of

these female figures experience within the novel. She concludes by explaining how sexual harassment is used as a tactic in the novel. However Mitra, in addition to pointing out the sexual disempowerment of women in the novel, illustrates the empowerment of women through the character of Godmother. Mitra's feminist exploration is furthered in more recent studies such as Jacquelynn Kleist's (2011) article 'More than Victims: Versions of Feminine Power in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*'. Kleist challenges the presentation of women as oppressed victims and urges for the understanding of female characters in *Cracking India* as, "women possessed with distinct forms of power, as they exhibit their individual forms of agency. *Cracking India*, like texts by female authors Quratulain Hyder, Amrita Pritam and Jamila Hashmi break free from hegemony of patriarchal partition narratives to provide a distinct female counter-narrative" (Kleist, 2011, p.70).

Expanding this feminist stance, my chapter on Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, serves as an addition to the existing feminist critique of the novel. However, my exploration of Sidhwa's novel stresses the importance of body, especially female body, in exposing the patriarchal biases towards women. I argue that *Ice Candy Man* allows the female figures to realise the oppression that works through their bodies and they challenge this oppression physically and mentally. Through the character of Ayah I intend to demonstrate how a female figure, by defeating her oppressor, sets the ground for a feminist awakening. Whereas Ayah is caught in a more physical battle with Ice Candy Man, Lenny fights on an emotional level. Ayah's physical escape from Ice Candy Man's house and Lenny's emotional escape from her cousin's sexual molestation demonstrate the refusal of the female figure to be identified merely as sexual objects. They emerge as survivors of male violence eager to re-define their lives and identities according to their choice and will.

I have chosen to refer to *Cracking India* by its original title of *Ice Candy Man*. This title, I believe, helps me to better explain the thematic concern of my chapter, as Ice Candy Man, one of the main male characters of the novel, encapsulates the patriarchal male figure. His dynamic personality, throughout the narrative, lays the patriarchal grounds upon which the feminist awakening is realised. I use the term feminist awakening to describe the turning point in the lives of female figures where they realise that their

bodies are more vulnerable in a male defined world and they vouch to fight to claim their bodies as theirs. The Hindu Ayah, the child Lenny, Godmother, Lenny's mother and numerous other female characters serve as the stepping stones upon which Sidhwa carefully balances her negotiation of the female figure within the gendered world of her novels. Lenny's disability and sexual maturation in a patriarchal world, Papoo's maltreatment and forced marriage, Ayah's sexual victimisation and Lenny's mother's silent suffering in the face of her husband's infidelity shows both the violent and subtle oppressions women suffer in a male dominated society. The chapter then moves on to focus on Sidhwa's presentation of Muslim characters, as her second novel *The Pakistani Bride* is firmly grounded in the Muslim setting of post-partitioned Pakistan.

This chapter highlights the struggle of the female figures in their resistance to patriarchal control over their bodies and sexualities. As Ayah, the most desired female body at the beginning of the novel is later victimised under the guise of partition riots, Sidhwa, exposes the unquestionable male control over female bodies. Further, Ice Candy Man's infatuation with Ayah, which later turns into a maddening obsession to 'possess' her, reveals the male obsession of control and dominance over women and their bodies. Sidhwa presents Ayah and other female characters engrossed in some form of struggle centred on their bodies and sexualities which have to be resisted in order for them to attain their identity. By identity I mean the self-assertion of the female figure, her own self-definition which does not involve any forced male views. The freedom to decide for herself in all matters of her life allows for this self-definition of the female figure. This does not necessarily mean that all the female characters in *Ice Candy Man* emerge as independent women free of male control but what I wish to establish here is the importance of resistance against male oppression. Sidhwa's female figures find their lives centred on their bodies and sexualities through which they realise their gendered existence in a patriarchal world.

Sidhwa bases *Ice Candy Man* in the Muslim dominated city of Lahore. This Lahore of the 1940s and later the Lahore she describes in *The Pakistani Bride* of the 60s and 70s shows a similar sexually segregated environment dominated by Muslim population. One of the differences is that, unlike the Lahore in *The Pakistani Bride*, the Lahore of the 40s in *Ice*

*Candy Man* is initially a pre-partitioned Lahore with many cultural and religious groups co-existing. Lenny's Parsi family is amongst one of the minority religious groups, as well as Hindus and Sikhs, who also live in this pre-partitioned Lahore. Lenny belongs to a wealthy Parsi family and because she is polio-stricken her parents have employed an Ayah, named Shanta, to look after her. Ayah is Hindu by religion and lives away from her family and works as a child carer. Lenny spends most of her time with Ayah both at home and outside. As the eight year old Lenny struggles with her polio stricken leg her Ayah brings her relief from her pain through their adventures into the city of Lahore. These adventures also include meetings with many admirers Ayah has acquired over time such as Ice Candy Man, Masseur, the zoo keeper, the cook and the Pathan Sherbet Khan. Both Ayah and Lenny mutually benefit each other. Ayah provides Lenny with entertainment, adventures, and visits to the zoo. Lenny's world as she herself expresses in the very opening lines of the novel, "my world is compressed" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.1) is actually expended through her pairing with Ayah who takes her around the city. Furthermore, Lenny enjoys Ayah's sexual flirtations with her admirers and in return gives Ayah an excuse to meet her admirers and a break from the tiring routine of domestic chores.

The images of purdah clad women accompanied by their men in *Ice Candy Man* are presented in sharp contrast to this Hindu Ayah who roams freely into the streets of Lahore. Ayah is presented as an exception to the strict rules of the Muslim dominated Lahore, where Muslim women observed purdah. Ayah lives her life according to her whim and fancies. This is accordingly shown by Sidhwa through Ayah's choice of wearing a sari over a more modest covering of shalwar and kameez, a loose and baggy shirt and trouser used by Muslim women. Ayah's tightly fitting sari adds sexual appeal to her slim figure as she roams around with Lenny in her pram. Such bold venturing into the male dominated society where women covered their bodies places Ayah as a centre of attention. Ayah's care-free wandering amidst a cross-section of Lahori men comes with the security she gains by being employed by the influential Sethi family. Ayah's body stands as the most desired body throughout the novel, as Lenny describes:

Ayah is chocolate-brown and short. Everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump. Even her face. Full-blown cheeks,

pouting mouth and smooth forehead curve to form a circle with her head...And, as if her looks were not stunning enough, she has a rolling bouncy walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks under her cheap colourful saris and the half-spheres beneath her short sari-blouses. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.3)

Ayah's appealing body is desired by a range of men who gather in the park to meet Ayah. During one of their routine visits to the park, Lenny notes, "Ayah becomes breathless laughing and almost rolls on the grass. Her sari slips off her shoulders and her admirers relish the brown gleam of her convulsed belly beneath her skimpy blouse, and the firm juggle of her rotund bosoms" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.100). Ayah's body 'draws' the men from different backgrounds and Lenny is influenced by her interaction with these men:

The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences and ogle at her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.3)

As evident Ayah's sexually appealing body is desired by a range of men of whom *Ice Candy Man*, Masseur and Sherbet Khan remain the most favoured by Ayah. Ayah's response towards these men varies as she is infatuated by Sherbet Khan, finds Masseur sexually attractive and flirts with *Ice Candy Man*. Sidhwa here highlights a range of human emotions especially in a society steeped in sexual segregation and repression. Similarly, Ayah's admirers behave in different manners towards her. Sherbet Khan displays a shy and timid attitude never physically touching Ayah and Masseur presents a gentleman like attitude, yet confident in his feeling towards Ayah as they are more physical in their relationship. *Ice Candy Man* remains the most passionate towards Ayah and as she later favours Masseur over him, his passion turns into an obsession to have her body. Apparently nameless, *Ice Candy Man* is one of the leading male characters whose personality remains an interesting blend of many personas. He likes to be identified according to the different seasonal businesses that he takes up.

From the moment we are introduced to Ice Candy Man, we become aware of his constant struggle to gain access to Ayah's body. She becomes the centre of his pursuing eyes, hands and feet, as Lenny narrates, "things love to crawl beneath Ayah's sari. Ladybirds, glow-worms, Ice Candy Man's toes" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.19). He begins to follow Ayah and Lenny around, "he prowls the hills behind the zoo lion's cage and lurks in the tall pampas grass. He follows us everywhere as we walk hand in hand" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.177). As the partition draws near and as Ayah begins to favour Masseur, Ice Candy Man becomes ever more assertive in his pursuit of Ayah as Lenny describes, "Where Masseur is, Ayah is. And where Ayah is, is Ice Candy Man" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.121). Ayah remains unaware but Lenny senses his presence even when he is not clearly visible to her eyes. Lenny notes:

While Masseur's voice lures Ayah to the dizzy eminence of one minaret, it compels Ice Candy Man to climb the winding stairs to the other minaret. On the river bank I sense his stealthy presence in the tall clumps of pampas grass. He lurks in the dense shade of mangoes in the Shalimar Gardens and in the fearsome smells skirting the slaughter house... He prowls on the other side of the artificial hill behind the zoo lion's cage, and conceals himself behind the peacocks when they spread their tail feathers and open their turquoise eyes: he has as many eyes, and they follow us. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.121)

During Ice Candy Man's increasingly aggressive seeking of Ayah's body, Ayah comes across as an assertive woman who allows her admirers calculated advances towards her body. Ayah seems to be in control of her body as she decides whether or not her admirer should be allowed to enjoy her company or to have access to her body. As Lenny observes, "Ice Candy Man is a raconteur. He is also an absorbing gossip. When the story is extra good, and the tentative toes polite, Ayah tolerates them" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.19). Ayah's increasingly assertive behaviour clearly speaks of her growing confidence. She enjoys the multicultural company of the varied men around her as she sells her good looks and beauty to buy the different gifts and services her admirers have to offer. Ice Candy Man's informative stories, Masseur's clever fingers as they massage their way to Ayah's body, Sherbet Khan's fruits from the mountains and knife sharpening skills are all accepted as payments by Ayah for her display of her beautiful body.



Lenny's observations of Ayah's body make Lenny more aware of her own body. The pride and confidence Ayah exhibits towards her body influences Lenny's approach towards her own body. She refuses to see her body as being 'dis-abled'; on the contrary, she sees her body as 'more-abled' as Lenny herself expresses, "having polio in infancy is like being born under a lucky star. It has many advantages" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.10). Lenny's disabled body allows her extra attention, affection and love from not only her own mother but Ayah and Godmother who also serve as mother figures for her. As she learns to deal with her polio-stricken leg, we are shown a humorous account of how she uses her disabled body to garner sympathy and moral support from those around her, especially Ayah's admirers, "I take advantage of Ayah's admirers. 'Massage me!' I demand, kicking the handsome Masseur. He loosens my laces and unbuckles the straps gripping my boots. Taking a few drops of almond oil, from one of the bottles in his cruet set, he massages my wasted leg then my okay leg" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.18). *Ice Candy Man* provides her with ice candies and the zoo keeper tells her tales of the wild lion and promises to keep her safe from the fierce zoo lion. Lenny too seems to be aware of her importance as an entry to Ayah and therefore, basks in the attention offered to her as she manipulates Ayah's admirers and other people around her according to her whim and fancies.

However, her body also brings her pain as well as pleasure as Lenny explains, "I switch awake to maddening pain... I become aware of the new plaster cast on my leg. The shape of the caste is altered from last time. The toes points up. The pain from my leg radiates all over my small body" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.6). Lenny's bodily pain runs parallel with the emotional pain that the characters experience, as the sub-continent is operated upon to re-caste it into two separate countries. Lenny's bodily pain therefore links her to the national trauma, her pain and sufferings felt by all but especially the female victims. Just as her Parsi doctor informs her mother that it was the British to be blamed for polio in the subcontinent, Lenny feels a bodily link steeped in pain with the political situation of her country. Lenny, while in some ways valuing her disability, also recognises and internalises its perception by the world, especially in contrast with the 'whole' body of her brother:

I am skinny, wizened, sallow, wiggly-haired, ugly. He is beautiful. He is the most beautiful thing, animal, person, building, river or mountain that I have seen. He is formed of gold mercury. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.22)

Lenny's self-perception is 'physical'. Her skinniness (due to her disability) is perceived as 'ugliness'. On the other hand, her brother, as she states, "never stands still enough to see. He turns, ducks, moves, looks away, vanishes" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.22). He is an agile and active creature who has the capacity to move freely. He is perceived as something valuable, as valuable as gold, as majestic as a mountain and flowing like a river. Lenny expresses an ambivalent attitude towards her body as it stands as a site both despised and valued by her.

Lenny's self-effacing attitude towards her body often results from the remarks she hears from people around her. As in one instance Lenny, while having tea with Godmother, recalls "drinking tea, I am told, makes one darker. I am dark enough. Everyone says, its pity Adi's fair and Lenny so dark. He is a boy. Anyone will marry him" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.81). The despairing tone highlights Lenny's gender marginalisation through her body shape and colour. Lenny's innocent perception highlights her internalisation of her gendered position within the society. She learns that being dark skinned is a matter of more social concern for a girl as compared to a boy. So the apparent privileged position that Lenny enjoys because of her disability does not necessarily spare her the gender marginalisation in society. In fact, early in the novel, Lenny's mother is concerned about her schooling but she is told by the doctor that, "she is doing fine without school isn't she? Don't pressure her...her nerves would be affected. She does not need to become a Professor. She'll marry - have children - lead a care free life. No need to strain her with studies and exams", he advises: thereby sealing my fate" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.15). Lenny's doctor confines Lenny within the gender role ascribed for women by the society. He does not feel that missing school education is a matter of a great concern for a girl. In other words, her intellectual development is easily dismissed in the face of her biological duties.

Sidhwa exposes the rigid attitudes held against women's intellectual development and the little attention paid to such matters. She further exemplifies this social harshness

through the character of Papoo, a sweeper woman's daughter, who works for Lenny's family. Papoo's life is defined by a hard routine of domestic chores and she is further abused by her mother. Papoo is defiant and a wild spirited girl, who refuses to be tamed into docility. The mother-daughter relationship between Muccho and Papoo is not based on the kind of love and affection with which Lenny is showered. Papoo represents the female figure that may be able-bodied, yet her body is still held and treated as a site of physical and emotional torture. Papoo is first introduced when she is unconscious after the beating she receives from her mother, "She lies, ashen, immobile - the right side of her dark cheek and small mouth slightly askew, a thread of saliva stretched to a wet spot on the dhurrie" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.11). This unconscious female figure, poverty stricken, becomes a prey to her mother's frustrations. Her body serves as a site upon which her mother vents her frustrations and anger. The verbal and the physical abuse that Papoo is subjected to reflects her mother's inner turmoil and Papoo's body, especially her hair become the target, or even the canvas upon which her mother paints her frustrations:

'Bitch! *Haramzadi!* May you die!' And Muccho's grasping hand reaches for the root of her daughter's braid. The gaunt, bitter fingers close on the hair, yanking cruelly, and Papoo bows back and staggers backwards at an improbable angle. She falls, sitting on her small buttocks, her legs straight out; still holding the jolted and blinking infant on her hip and the broom in her hand. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.45)

Papoo suffers extreme torture at the hands of her mother for no apparent reason. Muccho is a woman who believes in gender fixed roles and is submissive to her husband. She wishes to mould her daughter in a similar way. Papoo's defiant behaviour angers Muccho as she fails to envision her daughter outside of the socially dictated gender norms. She is threatened by Papoo's non-submissive behaviour for which she abuses her. Lenny believes some day Muccho would kill her daughter, considering at one point, "from the improbable angle of Papoo's twisted limbs, I am sure she has already done so" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.46). The 'improbable angle' at which Papoo's limbs are bent by her mother symbolically reflects the moulding of the female figure into submission. This physical twisting of Papoo's limbs by her mother stands reflective of emotional and psychological submission expected of women by the society.

Papoo refuses to be submissive to her mother and through her gestures and behaviour she makes her mother angry. For instance, Papoo often pretends to have concussions to escape beating from her mother. Lenny observes one of these instances:

Skipping nimbly from her mother's lunges, Papoo jerks her boyish hips and makes dark, grinning faces and rude and mocking sounds and gestures. All at once she pretends to go limp and, again rolling her eyes up to show their whites, crumples defenceless to the ground; and then spinning like a bundle of rags in a gale, flinging her limbs about, twists away from Muccho's eager clutches; dodging, jeering, now tantalising close, now just out of reach. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.47)

The extraordinary ability displayed by Papoo through her body reflects the clever use Papoo puts her body to in order to avenge her mother. Papoo's struggle with her body becomes a negotiation of the female figure within her own her body, where the body serves as a 'space' which the female figure uses as an emotional outlet of her frustration, or a medium of catharsis. Papoo uses her bodily capacity to enact a form of revenge on her mother and thereby her body becomes a site of resistance and pleasure as it allows her the power to annoy her mother. It is this high spiritedness that Lenny admires, "Papoo is not like any girl I know. Certainly not like the other servants' children, who are browbeaten into early submission. She is strong and high spirited, and it is not easy to break her body...however, there are subtler ways of breaking people" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.47). Lenny's mother is also bent on taming Lenny's body. She blames herself for Lenny's disability and works to put her disabled limb straight:

Mother massages my leg. I lie diagonally on the bed, my small raised foot between her breasts. She leans forward and pushes back the ball of my foot. She applies all her fragile strength to stretch the stubborn tendon. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.41)

Just as it is difficult to tame Papoo who is strong and high spirited and it's not easy to break her body, Lenny's body too is put through rigorous operations and exercises to bring it back into the right shape. Lenny and Papoo both find their bodies as sites of struggle fought against and with to caste them into a feminine mould.

Whereas Lenny's body has to be shaped into a physically beautiful body, Papoo's body on the other hand, has to be tortured and tamed into submission and docility which are considered to be appropriate feminine attitudes. Papoo's mother finds a way of breaking Papoo's wild spiritedness. She marries her to a middle aged dwarf and to keep her calm through the wedding ceremony she drugs Papoo into a state of semi-unconsciousness, "Papoo sits up, shoving her *ghoongat* back drowsily, and looks at me with a strange cock-eyed grin, as if she is drunk" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.186). Thus, Papoo's mother, through an ill matched marriage, binds her daughter into a life of subservience. She performs her gender role, as a mother, that is expected of her by the society. Muccho sees her daughter's bold behaviour as a potential threat to her motherly role. She is afraid that Papoo would bring shame to her as she voices her concern to Ayah, "She is no innocent! She's a curse-of-a-daughter...Disobedient, bone lazy, loose charactered...she'll shame us. She'll be the death of me, the whore!" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.46). To avoid this possible shame, that Muccho believes her daughter would bring on her, she marries her in haste. Thus, Sidhwa points out how women, such as Muccho, are firmly bound to perform within gender roles that ultimately work to their disadvantage.

Not only Muccho but Lenny's own mother and even Lenny to some extent perform within the gender constructed norms set by the society. In fact, Lenny observes and learns these patterns of feminine behaviour, restricted within socially expected gender roles, through her mother. For instance, Lenny's mother occupies a very submissive role as a wife in her daily routine of greeting her husband, serving dinner and chatting non-stop to please him. Lenny observes:

I hear the metallic peal of Father's cycle bell and rush out to welcome him. Mother rushes out of another door. Mother removes his solar topi...relieves him of his ledgers and taking hold of his arm winds it about herself, making little moaning sounds. With me clinging on to his waist and mother hanging onto his arm Father labours up the veranda steps...Mother and I sit with him. Mother talks while he chomps wordlessly on his food and looks at her out of the assessing and disconcerting eyes of a theatre critic. (*Ice Candy Man*, pp.78-79)

Lenny's mother strives to please her husband who, evidently, considers her behaviour to be part of her wifely duties. His observation as a 'theatrical critic' conjures the image of a performance in which both Lenny and her mother act eloquently. Lenny is shown to master this art of performance as she learns to participate at the right time, "And when Mother pauses, on cue, I repeat any remarks I'm supposed to have made: and ham up the performance with further innocently insightful observations. Father rewards me with solemn nods, champing smiles, and monosyllables" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.79). Thus, Lenny as a young female is quick to learn that her father holds an important position within the house where her mother is required to work around his needs.

She is also able to understand the dynamics of relationships between men and women in her society. She is able to see how Ayah uses her body, and her mother uses the gift of the gab to deal with the men in their lives. Though Lenny's mother is apparently a submissive wife but the strategies she employs to deal with her husband reflects how she can at times manipulate her subordination to her advantage. As Lenny notes in one of the incidents, her mother tackles her father and manages to find the money that Lenny's father has hidden in their room. She takes as much money as she requires while Lenny's father tries to stop her. Similarly, she observes how her mother fills her father with the daily gossips as he returns home from work and how she is able to steer her conversation in the right balance to please him:

Mother chatters about friends and supplies political titbits...A little later, mention of Adi's hostile antics causes Father to scowl and out of sharp and judgmental eyes gazes acutely at Mother. Switching the bulletin immediately Mother recounts some observations of mine as if I've spent the entire morning mouthing extraordinarily brilliant, saccharinely sweet and fetchingly naive remarks. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.79)

Evidently Lenny's mother is, to some extent, able to mould her previously gender subordinated position to her advantage. However, there are also occasions where her mother is unable to assert her control over her husband. For instance, Lenny notes that her father often disappears in the middle of the night despite her mother's vehement attempts to dissuade him, "'No, Jana; I won't let you go to her!' Sounds of a scuffle. Father goes anyway. Where does he go in the middle of the night? To whom? Why...when

mother loves him so? Although Father has never raised his hands to us, one day I surprise mother at her bath and see bruises on her body” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.212). Her mother’s bruised body leaves Lenny confused. Perhaps this is the reason why Lenny becomes possessive about her body especially when she is with her cousin who is always eager to show his body parts to her. Lenny recalls the incident when her cousin was insistent on showing Lenny his scar after his operation:

Unbuttoning his fly and exposing me to the glamorous spectacle of a stitched scar and a hand full of genitals...I touch the fine scar and gingerly hold the genitals he transfers to my palm... His genitals have grown since I last examined them...The penis is longer and thicker and gracefully arched - it seems to be breathing. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.161)

Lenny also discovers certain changes in her body but unlike her cousin she feels too possessive to show anyone, “Two little bumps have erupted beneath my nipples. Flesh of my flesh, exclusively mine. And I am hard put to protect them. I guard them with a possessive passion...Only I may touch them. Not Cousin, Not Imam Din, not Adi. Not anybody. I can’t trust anyone” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.219). Thus, her skinny, sallow and wiggly-haired body no longer remains undesirable but rather, it becomes desirable as her cousin wishes to marry her when she grows up, “‘I’ll marry you...a slight limp is attractive’, says Cousin. ‘I like the way it makes your bottom wiggle. When you’ll grow up you’ll have a much bigger bottom; it will look attractive then’” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.217). Whereas her cousin openly allows Lenny to examine his private parts, Lenny, on the other hand, refuses to allow her cousin to touch her. Lenny’s developing body is not only a source of pride and excitement for her but it also brings her the confidence that she previously lacked:

As the mounds beneath my nipples grow, my confidence grows. I examine my chest in the small mirror hanging at an angle from the wall and play with them as with cuddly toys. With my limp and my burgeoning breasts - and the projected girth and wiggle of my future bottom - I feel assured that I will be quite attractive. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.220)

Lenny becomes possessive about her body and is angry at her cousin and brother’s constant attempts to touch her and watch her bathe:

‘Let me let me’...says Cousin and pokes his hand out every-which-way every chance he gets. I find it fatiguing to maintain my distance from him. And from Adi, who resolutely materialises whenever I am bathing and glues his eyes to a crack in the bathroom door. When Hamida blocks it, Adi shifts to another crack: and when that too is plugged, he jumps up and down on a ledge outside the bathroom window with a rapt determination that is like an elemental force. (*Ice Candy Man*, pp.219-220)

Lenny’s physical development is coupled with emotional development as she finds herself drawn into the new world of understanding, “something happens inside me. Though outwardly I remain as thin as ever I can feel my stomach muscles react to create a warm hollow” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.78). She begins to look at the world with ‘female eyes’. She runs wild with romantic fantasies as her ‘body’ opens up new avenues of discoveries and adventures for her. Her world suddenly becomes populated largely by men:

I look about me with new eyes. The world is athrob with men. As long as they have some pleasing attributes - height, width or beauty of face - no man is too old to attract me. Or too young. Tongawallas, knife-sharpeners, shop-keepers, and policemen...all exert their compelling pull on my runaway fantasies in which I am recurringly spirited away to remote Himalayan hideouts; there to be worshipped, fought over, died for, importuned and wooed until, aroused to passion that tingles from my scalp to the very tips of my fingers, I finally permit my lover to lay his hands upon my chest. It is no small bestowal of favour for my chest is no longer flat. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.219)

Lenny begins to enjoy and basks in the male-centred cultural fantasies regarding her sexuality. She begins to respond to the desire and longings communicated by Ayah’s admirers during their secret meetings. Regarding Ayah’s passionate meeting with Masseur, Lenny observes that, “his voice is gravelly with desire and it makes something happen inside my stomach: as when Sherbet Khan, radiant with love, ogles Ayah” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.119). Lenny thus presents a liberating view towards female sexuality as evident through her pride, excitement and control over her body. In a way she resembles Ayah who, before partition, feels confident and has control over her body. Lenny comes across many instances where her cousin is eager to demonstrate newly learnt sexual behaviours but Lenny manages to escape these situations:



Cousin squeezes my breasts and lifts my dress and grabs my elasticised cotton knickers. But having only the two hands to do all this with he can't pull them down because galvanised to action I grab them up and jab him with my elbows and knees: and turning and twisting, with my toes and heels. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.240)

Regardless of whether she is aware of the full nature of the sexual connotations behind her cousin's harassments, Lenny clearly seems to feel uncomfortable with her body being used in this manner by her male cousin. In one other incident as her cousin tries to place his hands on Lenny's chest, she gives him a severe thrashing, "I draw back, slapping his hands till my palms sting, feeling sick and all shrivelled up. 'If you ever do that again, I'll break your fingers knuckle by knuckle' I say severely" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.231). Lenny applies a similar kind of self-confidence to deal with her male cousin as Ayah did with her admirers before partition. However, Ayah is unable to guard her body as her admirers, under the guise of partition riots, forcefully carry her away. Lenny notes:

They drag her by her arms...her violet sari slips off her shoulder, and her breasts strain at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth...A sleeve tears under her arm. The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.183)

Lenny witnesses how these men touch Ayah's body and stand so close to her that Ayah is unable to guard herself like she did before. Her body seems to have lost its ability to charm men into submission. The sexual repression thus surfaces as men who admired Ayah take the partition riots as an opportunity to devour Ayah's body satisfying their long repressed urges. Lenny's young mind is unable to fathom the larger political unrest around the country but she becomes well aware of the vulnerability of women after Ayah's abduction incident. Helpless and confused Lenny vents her frustrations by torturing her doll:

I hold it upside down and pull its pink legs apart. The knees and thighs bend unnaturally. I hold one leg to Adi. 'Here,' I say 'pull it'... 'Pull, damn it!' I scream... Adi and I pull the doll's legs, stretching it in a fierce tug-of-

war, until making a wrenching sound it suddenly splits. The cloth skin is ripped right up to its armpits spilling chunks of greyish cotton and coiled brown coir and innards that make its eye blink and make it squawk 'Ma-ma'. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.138)

The spilling chunks of greyish cotton from the body of the doll reflects the spilling and mutilated bodies in the maddening dismembering of the body parts across Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*. This in turn reflects the countless bodily mutilations carried out on the larger scale during the partition transfer across the borders. Sidhwa highlights the bodily mutilations of women through a particular incident in the novel where Ice Candy Man is seen waiting at the Lahore train station to receive his sisters from the Amritsar train. He is stunned into utter shock and terror when, as the train approaches the platform, he observes, "everyone in it is dead. Butchered. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts!" Ice candy man's grip on the handle bars is so tight that his knuckles bulge whitely in the pale light" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.149). The inhuman and grotesque nature of the violence drives Ice Candy Man to the verge of insanity as he later confesses:

I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train. That night I went mad, I tell you! I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs...I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women...The penises! (*Ice Candy Man*, p.156)

Lenny's tortured doll stands as the symbolic violation carried out especially against women on the larger scale. Consequently, Ice Candy Man abducts Ayah with the help of other Muslim men from Lenny's house to avenge the grotesque mutilation of his sisters and many other Muslim women. Sidhwa shows how a woman's body pays the price of violation of other women's bodies by the men of opposing communities. Though all the people involved in the partition receive their share of violence in one way or the other, it is the women however who remain the most violated and tortured victims. Their torture extended beyond the physical pain to the emotional and psychological violation of body. Nilufer, E. Bharucha (1998) voices:

Women are more often than not caught in the crossfire of these clashes, and their suffocating enclosures and limited spaces become even

smaller as patriarchy closes ranks on either side of the divide to protect what it sees as its property. Women have always been the ultimate territories and countries on whom men have mapped their rights of possession. (Bharucha, 1998, p.95)

Lenny further captures the gravity of the violent partition transfer through her mothers' bodily responses as Lenny describes, "Mother develops a busy air of secrecy and preoccupation that makes her even more remote...Her thin lips compressed in determined silence, her efficient eyes concentrated on inward thoughts" (*Ice Candy Man*, p. 171). Lenny struggles to make sense of her mother's intense and worried expression as she expresses, "Our bewildered faces again grow pale as we ponder their absences. We eat less. We are fretful" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.171). Thus, the larger political unrest is also reflected through Lenny and her brother's worried expressions and confused minds as they fail to comprehend the nature of the curious events taking place in their homes. For example, their mother's constant absence from home, the appearance of a black box in Lenny's house and Lenny's mother and Electric Aunt's frequent trips to unknown places indicates a disruption of her general house routine. This in turn reflects the wider political and social disruption in the outer world.

Lenny has another direct encounter with the horrific violence of the partition when, on her way home with Hari, she comes across a sack filled with a butchered body which is later discovered to be Masseur:

The swollen gunny-sack lies directly in our path. Hari pushes it with his foot. The sack slowly topples over and Masseur spills out - half on the dust sidewalk, half on the gritty tarmac...A wide wedge of flesh was neatly hacked to further trim his slender waist, and his spine, in a velvet trough, dipped into his lungi...Faces bob around us now. Some concerned, some curious. But they look at Masseur as if he is not a person. He isn't. He has been reduced to a body. A thing. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.175)

This body is no longer Masseur. No longer is he a 'person' who had a name and identity, but is instead a 'thing', identity less. He becomes a mass of flesh that 'spilled out' of the sack. Thus Sidhwa highlights how the political and religious conflict that resulted into the 1947 partition divided people into religious identities. Lenny observes how the people in

her neighbourhood suddenly became conscious of their religious identities, “I become aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves - and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah - she is also a token. A Hindu” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.93). Lenny observes how people desperately began clutching onto their religious identities to escape the wrath of the opposing communities. She notes how people began adorning their bodies with their respective religious symbols and became punctual in their praying:

Carried away by a renewed devotional fervour she expends a small fortune in joss-sticks, flowers and sweets on the gods and goddesses in the temples. Imam Din and Yousaf, turning into religious zealots, warn Mother they will take Friday afternoons off for the Jumha prayers...Sometimes, at odd hours of the day, they spread their mats on the front lawn and pray when the muezzin calls. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.93)

Lenny also learns that according to the Parsi faith the bodies of the dead are disposed of by being left for vultures to consume. As Godmother explains, “The dead body is put inside the *Dungerwadi*...the vulture picks it clean and the sun dries out the bones” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.113). Godmother’s emphasis on bodily religious devotion reflects the religious practices centred on the body. She firmly believes that it is only right that the body should serve its religious purpose by being consumed by the vultures. She explains:

Only last month Sir Eduljee Adenwalla had his leg amputated in Bombay. Sick as he was, he sat in his wheelchair all through the ceremonies and had his leg deposited in the *Dungerawadi*! And what do you think happens when Parsee diabetics’ toes are cut off? Do you think they discard them in the waste-basket and deprive the vultures? (*Ice Candy Man*, p.115)

Similarly, the cutting of the hair of a new born child, as well as the circumcision of new born Muslim male babies all speak of the body as a ‘site’ that renders meaning, assigns allegiance and membership of cultural and religious identities. Lenny’s gardener, Hari, who later changes his name to Himat Ali, when he converts to Islam, has to go through circumcision to prove his new Muslim identity. It would not be wrong to assert that Lenny resides in a very ‘bodily’ world, a world in which the bodies are pleasing, attractive

and beautiful, but also treated as things to be chopped, violated and raped. She discovers that women can become polluted and dirty and therefore unwanted because their bodies have been touched by strange men. She even learns of bodies to be offered as food to one's beloved as she is fascinated by the story Ayah narrates, of Sohni and Mahiwal<sup>6</sup>. As Mahiwal, finds no food to offer to his beloved Sohni, he cuts a hank of flesh from his thigh, and barbecues it for her. She also recounts her visit to Godmother's house where Dr. Manek, Godmother's brother-in-law, jokingly threatens Lenny that he will eat Godmother, "Now, where do I start?...Roast leg of Auntie or barbecued ribs? Of course! I'll make a nice jelly from her trotters! Seasoned with cinnamon and orange juice... I am in the mood for a tough old thing I can chew on" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.163). Thus the body in *Ice Candy Man*, therefore, remains the most important entity that in disability and ability, male, female, young and old serves to transfer a message.

The mass transfer phase is short lived and Lenny soon becomes aware of the birth of a new country, Pakistan. As Ayah is taken away from Lenny's house, a new Ayah named Hamida comes to work for the family. Lenny discovers that Hamida has four children but is not allowed into her own house as her husband refuses to accept her. Hamida reluctantly explains to Lenny that she is now a fallen woman as other men have touched her, therefore she has to leave her house and children. Through Lenny's innocent questions and observations Sidhwa exposes the patriarchal violence enacted through women's bodies. She highlights the sheer helplessness of raped women who are victimised on more than one level. Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2005) voices the association of the female body and the sexual violation in the following words:

As in other moments of collective violence, it was the systematic rape of women that trauma and body obviously linked. Women were raped and mutilated during the mayhem of the partition because their female bodies provided a space over which the competitive games of men were played out. (Kabir, 2005, p.179)

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<sup>6</sup> A popular tragic romance story based in the Punjab province (Pakistan 18<sup>th</sup> century). The girl Sohni fell in love with Mahiwal but due to caste differences they could not marry. They continued to meet each other even after Sohni was forcefully married to someone else. Mahiwal would swim across the river to meet Sohni at night. One day he couldn't catch the fish he regularly fried for her, so he cut a piece of meat off his thigh and roasted it for Sohni. Later Sohni started to swim across the river on an earthen pot to meet Mahiwal but she drowned and dies as her pot was replaced by an unbaked pitcher. Mahiwal who saw Sohni drown also jumped into the river and they both died.

Further, the beating, raping and the violation of the female body during the partition struggle imprinted strong messages on the minds of the female figures that were 'doubly displaced'. Their houses were broken into and so were their bodies. Sidhwa shows that the larger sexual victimisation of women carried out under the guise of partition riots is actually patriarchal exploitation of female sexuality which reflects in the everyday lives of women. In other words, the female body and sexuality remain sites of male control and domination both in times of peace and war.

The female body in *Ice Candy Man* becomes a site on which the different religious communities inscribe their messages of revenge, and express their frustrations. To kill or rape a woman of the other religious community becomes a violation of the sacred space of the other. Thus, women are regarded as bodies and their bodies as spaces. Margaret Higonnet and Joan Templeton (1994) claim that, "the only space that (however dubiously) belongs to women may be of their own bodies, a space defined by vestimentary envelope, strictly policed yet often violated...the exploited body is one of the pages on which imperial maps of power, whether political, religious, or economic are drawn" (Higonnet and Templeton, 1994, p.5-6). The book by these authors, *Reconfigured Spheres*, explores how feminist literary critics, "have begun to undertake new cartographies, to trace the ways writers inscribe gender onto the symbolic representation of space within texts, whether through images of physical confinement, of exile and exclusion, of property and territoriality, or of the body as the interface between individual and communal identities" (Higonnet and Templeton, 1994, p.2). Kathleen Komar (1994) points out two recurrent strategies in the treatment of female space. She explains, "Primarily women writers identify/project female spaces in the outside world then an opposite strategy is employed by the women authors to define and affirm themselves; they exploit an interior space that is both biological and psychological" (Komar, 1994, p.90). Sidhwa, in a similar manner, proceeds to identify/project female spaces in her gendered world of *Ice Candy Man*. The division of the country is presented by Sidhwa as if a body was broken into two parts. This projection of female spaces onto the outside world is clearly echoed when, after the partition, Slavester, Godmother's younger sister, informs Lenny, "we've all produced a baby...we've given birth to a new nation. Pakistan!" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.142). Thus, the

process of the formation of a new country in *Ice Candy Man* is presented as a very physical and bodily process especially associated with the female body.

However, Sidhwa points out the never ending determination women displayed in striving to bring order to their disordered lives and community. The female figures set out in their own capacity to mend the shattered lives of countless women by setting up camps to rescue bereaved women and children. Lenny's mother, her Electric Aunt and Godmother all play their part one way or the other. Tanja Stampfl (2010) in her essay 'Cracking (mother) India' highlights the role that women in Sidhwa's *Cracking India* play as 'mothers' in nation building during the mayhem of partition:

The strength of Sidhwa's novel lies in its many textual and metaphorical layers concerning the figure of mother, namely, mothers, mothering and mother India. While biological mother-daughter bonds are mostly dysfunctional in the novel, women on a communal level take up the pieces and begin to unify and heal broken bodies and a cracked country... Women who perform the acts of mothering, develop a strong bond that overcomes religious and ethnic enmities. (Stampfl, 2010, p.304)

Stampfl claims that motherhood unifies the female characters constructively to rebuild the nation. She further describes the motherly role played by Ayah and Godmother in the following words, "It is Ayah who introduces Lenny to the outside world by pushing the little girl in her pram... As Ayah performs the role of the motherly educator; Godmother offers the motherly love and affection that Lenny needs" (Stampfl, 2010, p.305). Taking on what Stampfl describes as the female nourishment of a broken nation, I agree that the concept of 'motherhood' and 'mothering' remains a prominent feature of Sidhwa's narrative. However, it was more than 'motherhood' and 'mothering' that united the women in rebuilding the nation.

The female figures in Sidhwa's gendered, patriarchal world unite in a common understanding through the violent acts performed on their bodies. Their challenge and resistance against the patriarchal violence unites them through common needs that transcend the boundaries of race, colour and religion. It is the female body rather than

Stampfl's concept of mothering which is more powerful in its capacity to draw the female characters in the need to act. The sexual violation of the female figures, the mutilation and the stripping naked therefore stands as the 'usurpation' and the 'transgression' of numerous female spaces. As discussed before, the 'female body' whether of Lenny or Ayah or of other major and minor female/male characters in *Ice Candy Man* retains, despite violation, the ability to communicate and unite in sympathy and understanding with each other. This understanding and communication of the female figures are bodily apprehensions which endow the female figures with the ability to resist, challenge and survive the cultural oppression. As asserted by Komar (1994), "Male violation of female internal spaces cannot destroy this bodily sympathy but, rather, strengthens the unity of physical apprehension for women" (Komar, 1994, p.95). Sidhwa's female figures reflect this unity and sense of connectedness amidst the violence caused by men.

Further, Godmother and Lenny's mother decide to rescue Ayah from the Muslim mob not because she was a surrogate mother to Lenny but because a woman's body was under the threat of violation. Hamida, Lenny's new Ayah who is also a mother of four, is rejected by her husband as he sees her as a female body that has been transgressed, violated, and polluted as she is abducted and raped by Hindu rioters, more than he sees her as a mother of his children. Mini Aunty who desires to donate blood is driven by kindness. As a woman she makes an effort to contribute through her body (blood) to help the injured and those in need. Further, the bond that joins Lenny with Godmother is expressed in Lenny's own words as follows:

I kiss her insatiably, excessively, and she hugs me. She is childless. The bond that ties her strength to my weakness, my fierce demands to her nurturing, my trust to her capacity to contain that trust – and my loneliness to her compassion - is stronger than the bond of motherhood. More satisfying than the ties between men and women. (*Ice Candy Man*, pp.3-4)

Lenny's disability and Godmother's inability to conceive therefore binds the two female figures together in a powerful bond, based on bodily incapacities and bodily inabilities that allow both Lenny and Godmother to unite in sympathy and understanding. Similarly,



it is this bodily association and affection between Lenny and Ayah that compels Lenny to seek Ayah after her abduction.

As life begins to settle in newly partitioned Pakistan, Lenny begins to roam into the city of Lahore in the hope of finding Ayah:

I roam the bazaars holding Himat Ali's wizened finger, Hamida's glutinous hand. I visit fairs and *melas*, riding on Yousaf's shoulders, looking here and there. And when I ride on the handlebar of his bicycle, peering into Tongas, buses, bullock-carts and trucks, I sometimes think I spot Ayah and exclaim! But it always turns out to be someone who only resembles Ayah. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.209)

After a long search Ayah is finally located. Lenny discovers that Ice Candy Man has married her and they live in a different part of Lahore. Hidden away into the world of Lahore's red light area, Ayah is forced to become a dancing girl. She shifts in her identity from a motherly figure and a caretaker to a dancing girl and a prostitute. Ayah is forcefully assigned a new identity as Ice Candy Man, her admirer, and then pimp, becomes her husband. As Ayah acquires new names and positions, Ice Candy Man too continues in his dynamic identity shifts from an Ice-popsicle man, to a bird seller, from a Muslim violator to an abductor, then from a pimp to Mumtaz's husband and later to a poet and ending as a 'fakir' (beggar). Ice Candy Man remains a dynamic character throughout the narrative as he shifts from one identity to the other. Early in the novel, Ice Candy Man puts on the appearance of a religiously devoted old man with such a perfection that no one recognises him. Lenny gives an account of his physical transformation:

Thumping a five-foot iron trident with bells tied near its base, the holyman lopes towards us, shouting: 'Ya Allah!' A straight, green, sleeveless shift reaches to his hairy calves. His wrists and upper arms are covered with steel and bead bangles. And round his neck and chest is coiled a colossal hunk of copper wiring. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.97)

Similarly, towards the end of the novel, Ice Candy Man emerges with a new persona as Ayah's husband. His new appearance is characterised by refined manners as Ice Candy

Man frequently uses couplets and lines from poems of romantic poets in his speech. Lenny is rather shocked to witness this new transformation:

He has changed from a chest-thrusting *paan*-spitting and strutting *goonda* into a spitless poet. His narrow hawkish face, as if recast in a different mould, has softened into a sensuous oval. He is thinner, softer, droopier: his stream of brash talk replaced by a canny silence. No wonder I didn't recognise him in the taxi. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.245)

The shifting nature of Ice Candy Man and Ayah's character and identity becomes more evident as Sidhwa refers to them according to their new role. Ice Candy Man is referred to as the 'husband' and 'the poet' and Ayah as 'the wife'. As Ayah becomes the victim of maddening revenge and is drawn into the chaotic disruption of the partition, Ice Candy Man too loses his sense of self. As Godmother scolds him and suggests that he should restore Ayah back to her family, Ice Candy Man goes into a fit and claims Ayah as part of his identity:

He tugs his hair back in such a way that his throat swells and bulges like a goat's before a knife, and in a raw and scratchy voice he says: 'I can't exist without her'. Then, rocking on his heels in his strange, boneless way, he pounds his chest and pours fistful of dirt on his penitent's head. 'I am less than the dust beneath her feet!' (*Ice Candy Man*, p.251)

Ice Candy Man ironically loses his sense of identity as he renders himself 'less than the dust beneath her feet'. Ice Candy Man's self-negation indicates Ayah's triumph and Ice Candy Man's failure. As Ice Candy Man becomes more confused, Ayah emerges to know exactly what she wants. She refuses to live with Ice Candy Man and thereby rejects the imposed identity on her. She refuses to live her life both as Mumtaz, Ice Candy Man's wife and Ayah, Lenny's care taker. Instead, she chooses to live as Shanta. This identity is not forced on her but rather it is chosen by her. Ayah refuses to be cast into the mould desired by Ice Candy Man. She suffers violence of all sorts and is forced to live with Ice Candy Man as his Muslim wife named Mumtaz, yet she grasps the first opportunity to discard all the limitations imposed on her. She takes the brave decision to confide in Godmother about her miserable condition when Godmother comes to visit her. She

requests that Godmother takes her to a refuge for abducted women from where she plans to cross the border into newly divided India.

Sidhwa thus allows us to see how women within their individual capacities resist the patriarchal oppression that victimises them mainly through their bodies and sexualities. The young Lenny's awakening to her female sexuality shows how the patriarchal world informs women of their sexuality, thus influencing their understanding of their position in the male dominated patriarchal world. For example, despite Lenny's observation of Ayah's affairs with her lovers, it is Lenny's male cousin who informs her about the possible exploitations of female sexuality. As he promises to demonstrate how women are raped and later warns Lenny about visiting Lahore's red light area at night which would definitely result in her being raped, we see how a young male figure instils the notions of violence towards the female body in a young girls' mind. He clearly seems to have more exposure and knowledge in matters of sexuality and informs Lenny of a violent male perspective that she is unable to see in Ayah's admirers and their soft caresses of Ayah's body. Her cousin exposes her to the realisation that the female body and sexuality is not always celebrated and cherished in the male world and thus gives her a harsh picture of another reality of women's lives.

However, Lenny's journey of realisation and 'awakening' is not merely restricted to her sexual awakening in a male dominated world but also to the harsh realities of a conflicting and dangerous world. She learns that the world is a place where people are capable of grotesque, vengeful and shocking atrocities, where people can be influenced by love to leave their religion (for instance Masseur decides to convert to Hinduism to marry Ayah) and at the same time, people can be driven by hatred to kill, exploit and destroy as Ice Candy Man burns the houses of Hindus, murders Masseur and kidnaps Ayah. Furthermore, Lenny journeys from her innocence to realise that the grown up world is not always honest. Imam Din takes an oath before Allah and swears that Ayah has left for Amritsar to save her from the Muslim mob who has gathered outside Lenny's house. Lenny, on the other hand, innocently discloses the truth about Ayah's presence in the house which consequently results in Ayah's abduction. The guilt stricken Lenny later realises that honesty is not always the best policy in the adult world and punishes her

truth infected tongue, “I hold the vile, truth-infected thing between my fingers and try to wrench it out...I punish it with rigorous scouring from my prickling toothbrush until it is sour and bleeding” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.184).

Sidhwa therefore, moves from slight romanticism to stark realism in her novel where her heroines, both through personal experience and observation learn of the underlying patriarchal oppressions that govern the lives of women on a daily basis. Lenny accidentally discovers her mother’s bruised body as she bathes one day, exposing the violence that her husband inflicts upon her. At the same time, Lenny’s mother despite, or perhaps because of her own bodily violation, provides help and support to the many rejected women by helping to build a shelter and recovery home for the fallen women. Though outwardly calm and happy we are startled and shocked to discover that Lenny’s mother is also the victim of patriarchal oppression as she struggles to retain her husband’s attention, money and most importantly his recognition of her. Thus Sidhwa in *Ice Candy Man* creates a multicultural perspective of female victimisation as her female characters belong to diverse religious and cultural backgrounds: Parsi, Hindu and Muslim. However, she draws the Muslim community in greater detail through the male characters like Ice Candy Man along with Lenny’s cook, Imam Din, as both are Muslims. Further Lenny’s visit to Imam Din’s village allows Sidhwa to delve deeper into the everyday lives of Muslim families focusing especially on women.

Though Sidhwa’s Novel *The Pakistani Bride* captures the lives of Muslim women in greater detail, in *Ice Candy Man* she creates very suggestive images of Muslim characters male and female. This portrayal comes across as quite critical and at some points stereotypical. But nevertheless it suggests a sexual repression that permeates the social interactions between men and women. Men are shown to be at a greater liberty in indulging in sexual adventures as compared to women. Ice Candy Man and Imam Din are both portrayed as lustful men always seeking any opportunity for sexual pleasure:

Ayah calls Imam Din the Catcher-in-the-kitchen. He sits in a corner on a wicker stool near the open pantry door and grabs anything soft that enters the kitchen. Sitting it, him, or her, on his lap he gently rocks. Ayah, I, Papoo, stray hens, pups, kittens and Rosy and Peter from next

door have all had our turn. And no matter how stealthily Ayah or I sneak into the kitchen, he is ready to pounce....It is what he playfully calls only a little *masti* - a little naughtiness. (*Ice Candy Man*, p.48)

Ice Candy Man too remains constantly engaged in the struggle to attain Ayah's body caressing her with his hands and even with his toes beneath her sari.

Whereas Sidhwa portrays her Muslim male characters as lustful men she portrays her Muslim female characters clearly in a subordinate position. For example, Lenny visits Imam Din's village, located in the outskirts of Lahore. She meets a Muslim boy named Rana. Rana's sisters were already being moulded into the role of obedient housewife's as Lenny observes, "his sisters, Khatija and Parveen, barely two years older than us, already wear the responsible expressions of much older women. Like the other girls in the village they affect the mannerism and tone of their mother and aunts" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.54). In one notable incident in the novel, Lenny, at the doctor's appointment meets a burka clad Muslim woman who avoids directly speaking to a male doctor and instead communicates through her husband. Later in the novel, Ice Candy Man dressed as a 'fakir' is approached by a burka clad young mother with four daughters desperately requesting Ice Candy Man to ask God if her next child would be a son. These characters and incidents do not directly contribute to the plot of the novel. However, Sidhwa creates these minor characters to expose the fixed gender roles and positions that men and women, young and old operate within. Thus, she not only points out the larger social structures that bind women in subordinated position in relation to men but she also focuses on day to day lives of women within their families that subordinate them in many ways.

Sidhwa shows her Muslim female characters caught up in child bearing and domestic issues, veiled in black burkhas (purdah) whereas her Muslim male characters are frequently indulged in sexually violating women through mild sexual perversions or serious offences such as rape. Sidhwa traces these issues in greater detail in her novel *The Pakistani Bride* which is analysed in the following chapter, however, *Ice Candy Man* allows precise and concise glimpse into the lives of women of all religions and cultures in general and Muslims in particular indicating the restricting confines, conflicting enclosures and sexual repression that governs the lives of people. Sidhwa in her

interview with Julie Rajan (2000) explains, “The novel is set in a part of the world where there is a great deal of sexual repression. In such a situation sexuality becomes obsessive; when there is a lid on sex it can permeate your whole being, your whole life” (Rajan, 2000, p.7). Sidhwa grew up in the Muslim dominated Pakistani society where the gender segregated atmosphere of her home, influenced by the wider social set up, left her confused and marginalised. Rajan further quotes Sidhwa, “The atmosphere in my house was segregated. When my brother’s friend came, I was told, ‘you better disappear’...that sort of thing. So I had no idea who I was or what I was” (Rajan, 2000, p.1). Sidhwa, despite living in a segregated and sexually repressed Pakistani Muslim society, explores the issues of female sexuality in great detail. According to her:

Sexuality represents a very strong force in everything - for men, women, and children. Like Lenny who is in love with 10% of the population of Lahore. It is not men who are promiscuous; women have these urges too. This is one of the few things I was conscious of doing deliberately. In Pakistan, there is an enormous sexual repression on women, it is a strong undercurrent...you are not supposed to feel this way or that way. You are supposed to be either very good or a prostitute. I wanted to show that this child (Lenny) who is so innocent and pure liked people of the opposite sex. (Rajan, 2000, p.7)

Through the cousin’s and especially Lenny’s sexual awakening, she not only highlights how young children explore, learn and internalise information about sexual matters but points out their ways of expression and desire. She details the sexual relationships of her female characters at various stages in their lives and under different circumstances. Her portrayal of female sexuality ranges from the innocent sexual explorations of young characters like Lenny, her cousin and Rosy to adults such as Ayah and her admirers to sexual matters between married couples as Lenny’s parents and even old people like Mr and Mrs Pen whom Lenny observes, “I feel sorry for Mrs Pen. I cannot imagine his (Mr Pen’s) fingers working the subtle artistry of Masseur’s fingers - or his sluggish toe conveying the dashing impulses of Ice Candy Man’s toes” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.81). Sidhwa highlights a child’s innocent sexual exploration alongside a grown up attitude towards female sexuality which at times gets harsher as social sexual repression explodes in the form of sexual victimisation of women. Sidhwa shows how women are then rendered identity less as their sexuality and sexual parts are used by men to fight wars.

Sidhwa interweaves the larger patriarchal political attitude towards female sexuality with the personal and individual exploration of sexuality at the domestic level to present how this sexual struggle affects and shapes the lives of women and their identities. She not only highlights the romantic, innocent and pleasurable aspect of sexuality for men and women but also reveals the exploitable and dangerous face of patriarchal sexual exploitation. Her female figure, especially Ayah at the beginning of the novel, expresses her sexuality according to her desire in a male dominated society where Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs kept their women covered. It is partly Ayah's transgression of the male defined norms and values of female behaviour that lead to her abduction and rape. As she is abducted and carried away by Ice Candy Man it is not too difficult to imagine the horror that awaits her, as a cross section of men, who lusted after her body would have taken the chance to rape her. As Godmother on discovering Ayah shouts at Ice Candy Man, "you permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks and goondas...let hundreds of eyes probe her" (*Ice Candy Man*, p.248). Sidhwa further evidences Ayah's sexual victimisation as Lenny's cousin learns of Ayah's predicaments and demonstrates to Lenny what men did with Ayah's body:

And Cousin starts to show me, and pulling my kicking feet from under me, succeeds in de-knicking me. And putting his hand there, trembles and trembles... Until I punch his ears and shout: 'Who told you all this?' I demand, pulling my knickers up. 'My cook told me'. 'Which men do these things to her?' I demand to know. 'Oh, any man who has the money ... My cook, Imam Din, the knife-sharpener, merchants, peddlers, the governor, coolies...'( *Ice Candy Man*, p.241)

As evident, Ayah's body is commercialised and sold to various men. The sexually appealing body that she flaunted proudly before partition becomes a targeted ground under the guise of partition mayhem. Ambreen Hai (2000) asserts, "As national borders are drawn to define post-colonial nationhood, the Hindu Ayah becomes the embodiment of the border that is crossed by the men of all sorts, the site of transgression itself" (Hai, 2000, p.411). Thus, Sidhwa through Ayah's predicaments and Lenny's sexual molestation by her older cousin points out the possible threat of patriarchal vengeance on women who try to assert their identity by owning their bodies and sexualities. However, Ayah's

assertiveness in leaving Ice Candy Man and Lenny's determination to escape all sexual advances of her cousin confirms a feminist awakening that enables both of these female characters to re-claim and protect their bodies from patriarchal exploitation. Thus, Ayah and Lenny not only succeed in surviving this violation but also demonstrate the capability of the female figure in attaining her identity as individuals with free will.



## Chapter no. 2

### Veil Unveiled; Purdah, Female Sexuality and Identity in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*

The thematic concerns of Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*<sup>7</sup> (1990) include purdah, its association with female sexuality and assertion of female identity in a sexually segregated Muslim society. *The Pakistani Bride* is Sidhwa's first novel written in her early twenties. The plot of the novel revolves around a young girl, Zaitoon, and a tribal man named Qasim who rescues her from a train attack as Muslim refugees cross the border into the newly partitioned Pakistan. Qasim and Zaitoon spend the following years in Lahore where they befriend Nikka and Miriam, a childless couple. As Zaitoon matures into a young woman Qasim decides to marry her into his tribe, to his nephew called Sakhi, to re-establish his ties with his people. Towards the end of the novel Zaitoon escapes from her unhappy and violent marriage back to the plains of Lahore. The events in this novel are inspired by a true story Sidhwa heard on her honeymoon trip in the mountains of Pakistan. On this trip Sidhwa learnt of a young bride who was married into the mountainous tribe. This bride tried to run away from her husband's house but was hunted down and killed. Sidhwa was shocked to hear of this atrocity and decided to write this story to highlight the haplessness of women living in harsh environments such as the mountainous tribes of Pakistan. Sidhwa expresses, "the girls' story haunted me: it reflected the hapless condition of many women not only in Pakistan but also in the Indian subcontinent. Telling it became an obsession" (Dhawan and Kapadia, 1996, p.28). In the actual novel, *The Pakistani Bride*, Sidhwa allows Zaitoon to survive her escape from her abusive husband. This indicates Sidhwa's desire to present her female characters as survivors of male injustice.

In this novel Sidhwa presents Muslim communities of the two culturally and geographically diverse areas within Pakistan, namely the city of Lahore in Punjab and the

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<sup>7</sup> The novel is also known by its original title, *The Bride*. It was published in India with the new title of *The Pakistani Bride*. It is important to note that the new title specifically indicates the Pakistani identity of the bride.

tribal area in Kohistan. The plot thus remains dynamic as Qasim, a Kohistani tribal, travels back and forth between Lahore and his tribe settled along the River Indus in Kohistan. This temporal and spatial shift exposes how men whether of the densely populated Lahore or the secluded tribal communities of Kohistan exploit women for their interests. I use the word 'tribal' to indicate Qasim's ethnic origin, as belonging to the tribes settled along the bank of the River Indus in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. The district of Kohistan within this province, also known as the 'land of mountains' is, "occupied by diverse, little studied communities and peoples. The whole area of Kohistan is notorious in North Pakistan for its anarchy, its violence and danger, its lethal conflicts both within and without" (Knudsen, 2009, p.xi). This area is also notorious for its ill treatment of women. *The Pakistani Bride* captures these ill treatments of women against the backdrop of sexually segregated Muslim lives in both the city of Lahore and the tribes of Kohistan.

The novel begins with a brief introduction of Afshan; a tribal girl given as compensation to Qasim's father for a loan that Afshan's father was unable to pay. This early incident in the novel reflects the 'object' status that women occupy in this tribal region of Pakistan where a young woman can be used as mode of exchange between men. The exchanged Afshan becomes Qasim's wife. The ten year old Qasim gradually matures into the role of a father and later sadly loses his wife and children as they die battling with small pox. After this tragedy Qasim decides to travel to the plains in search of a living. However, the violence and the chaos of the partition force him to cross the border into Lahore, Pakistan. It is on the train to Lahore that Qasim meets Zaitoon. This train carrying hundreds of Muslims is attacked by Sikhs before it crosses the border into Lahore. Qasim survives the attack and rescues Zaitoon but her parents are killed. Qasim, with Zaitoon, crosses the border into Lahore at the break of dawn and notes that, "The uneasy city was awakening furtively, like a sick man pondering each movement lest pain recur. The slaughter of the past weeks, the exodus, and the conflagrations were almost over" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.31). The Muslim dominated and sexually segregated Lahore that Sidhwa describes in *The Pakistani Bride* is the same Lahore where she ends her narrative of *Ice Candy Man*. These novels are thus linked both temporally and spatially. *The Pakistani Bride* begins from the time and place where *Ice Candy Man* ends.

By sexual segregation I mean the general separation of sexes in both public and private spheres and the observation of purdah or veil by women specifically in public spaces. Sidhwa's women are constrained within the enclosures of the male-defined rules of purdah and modesty physically, emotionally and sexually. This helplessly binds the oppression of women with their bodies. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, Sidhwa's female figures refuse to be exploited and break free from patriarchal confines to assert control over their bodies. As Sofia Sanchez-Grant (2008) notes, "the female body as a site of oppression has always been the means by which patriarchy exerts control over women" (Sanchez-Grant, 2008, p.78). In the same article, Margaret Sanger claims that, "no woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body... It is for women the key to liberty" (cited in Sanchez-Grant, 2008, p.78). Sidhwa's female figures, similarly, inhabit a patriarchal world where men believe in controlling women's bodies at all costs. As one meaning of purdah, for a woman, is to physically cover her body, the body then becomes a central concern both within and outside of purdah. Purdah has become a means of physical, emotional and psychological control of only female bodies and sexuality. Therefore, in order to attain some form of liberty, these women must strive to re-gain control over their bodies. In order to achieve this, Sidhwa does not call to abandon purdah by women of Muslim societies but, as this chapter will illustrate, women are urged to break free from male defined structures of piety and modesty to assert their individuality and identity.

This chapter highlights the different meanings and forms of purdah within the two markedly different geographical locations described in this novel, Lahore and Kohistan. This exploration and comparison reveals that purdah extends beyond the physical shrouding of women's bodies and includes a certain code of life. The observance of purdah varies in intensity, style and manner in geographically and culturally diverse areas within Pakistan. Similarly, men have devised different ways of exploiting women, and as this chapter will show, this causes the sexual segregation to become sexual repression within the Muslim society. Sexual repression, in turn, victimises both men and women. Men suffer emotionally whereas women face physical, sexual and emotional victimisation. Sidhwa creates female characters of both the purdah and non-purdah

society, of the plains, of the mountains, young and old, through which she exposes the inherent structures which shroud women in a range of ways. Their enclosures are physical, emotional and verbal endorsed in the name of modesty, piety and obedience. However, Sidhwa's female figures are shown to transgress and challenge these enclosures at times to assert their agency. As Nilufer, E. Bharucha (1998) notes:

If male discourse has dwelt on the mystique of the veil, the inner courtyards, the antharpurs and zananas, female discourse has attempted to subvert these moves by tearing apart the purdahs and demolishing the architectural enclosures of a misogynist patriarchy. (Bharucha, 1998, p.93)

Sidhwa exposes the hypocritical standards set against female sexuality especially in the Muslim society based on the sexual segregation which endorses strict limits of purdah for women. This purdah in both dress form and spatial segregation within houses, courtyards and zananas<sup>8</sup> with the aim of limiting and controlling female sexuality has been widely discussed in South Asian literature. Using both the symbolic and physical forms of purdah, this novel allows me to debate the repression and exploitation of the female figure. It also enables me to understand how purdah interacts with female sexuality to lay double standards for purdah and non-purdah women. Most importantly it allows me to argue how the patriarchal male understands purdah and creates his own standards of modesty for his women and the 'other' women. It will also allow me to conclude how notions of purdah and sexuality are tackled by Sidhwa's female figures in the pursuit of their identity.

The word 'purdah' originally derives from the Persian language and gives the literal meaning of 'a curtain', in the form of clothes; it refers to, 'burqa' or 'chador', with the aim of concealing the female body (Abid, 2009). Abid explains that the symbolic meaning of purdah stands for the 'seclusion' or 'separation' of the sexes. Purdah/veiling remains one of the most debated and criticised symbolic representations of male dominance. In the words of Uma Parameswaran (1995):

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<sup>8</sup> Certain rooms or a section of a Muslim house allocated for the women of the family.

The custom of purdah lends itself to both excessive romanticism and irate criticism. It has both an aura of idealisation and adverse implications of oppression of women, perpetuation of subservience and patriarchal power hierarchies. (Parameswaran, 1995, p.36)

Similarly, in her analysis of Attia Hosain's novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Sarla Palkar (1995) debates the limitations purdah has placed on the women of North India. She continues her argument by asserting that, "Purdah reduces women to invisibility and silences and thereby deprives her of her separate identity" (Palkar, 1995, p.108). Jasbir Puar (1995) voices a similar concern regarding purdah in the following words, "Purdah imposes on women the psychology of prisoners, of victims and the subordinates while it turns the men into gaolers and abettors in the process of this subordination" (Puar, 1995, p.216). Hanna Papanek (1982) links the role of purdah in restricting the sexual impulses of men and women as follows:

The institution of purdah provides symbolic shelter and often very real shelter for the women of the family. But what are those women being sheltered from? Underlying the entire system are certain assumptions about human interaction and about the nature of men and women. Symbolic shelter is provided both against real dangers of a segregated world but also, and not least significantly, against strong impulses such as sexual desire and aggregation. (Papanek, 1982, p.35)

In the light of the above arguments, Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* presents a multifaceted position of purdah in relation to women in a Muslim society. Sidhwa highlights that the true purpose of purdah has been distorted in Pakistani society to serve male interests. She does not delve into the Islamic origins and purpose of purdah but highlights how a religious practice has been misused by men to dominate women. She highlights the repercussions of this means of male dominance for both men and women of Muslim societies and allows her female characters to overcome the male defined limits of purdah. Consequently, Miriam and Zaitoon are both shown to transgress the male defined limits of purdah in many incidents, as will be elaborated later on in the chapter, but these women do not wish to discard or totally reject the practice of purdah. In other words, Sidhwa yearns for a better understanding and implementation of purdah which does not violate and oppress women, physically or emotionally. Sidhwa, unlike Shahraz,

does not belong to a Muslim family, but her interaction with Muslims around her, the influence of a Muslim culture she grew up in, made her aware of the importance and role of purdah for Muslim women. She exhibits a familiarity with this Muslim practice as Claire Chambers (2011) explains:

Many significant Pakistani Arab writers are secular, agnostic, atheists or like Pakistani-US novelist Bapsi Sidhwa, were not brought up as Muslims or come from other religious communities. They all have in common a Muslim civilizational heritage. (Chambers, 2011, p.124)

Sidhwa applies her knowledge, gained through experience of living in a Muslim society, to analyse and highlight both the benefits and consequences of sexual segregation in a Muslim society. As observed by Niaz Zaman (1995) in his analysis of Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*:

On its positive side purdah gives rise to a certain type of mystery, romance and excitement, though Sidhwa makes it very clear that the same segregation at its worst extreme is also responsible for the repressions that creates places like Hira Mandi where flesh is sold under the mask of culture and leads to the strict code that demands that a run-away life be killed. (Zaman, 1995, pp.156-157)

The notion of purdah in *The Pakistani Bride* is brought forward through various cleverly interwoven plots with the aim of providing multiple aspects of this concept. Further, as Sidhwa explores this concept through the female figures she creates, she shows us how the concept of purdah is applied differently to women in different places within the same country. The life of women in the plains is governed by a more overt form of purdah, where cloaks, chadors and burkhas act as a shield around the female body. The tribal people, living in the mountains of Kohistan, exhibit purdah in a more covert, codified manner. The high mountains and courtyards provide the physical boundaries enclosing and shielding the female body from the outside world. Jane (1995) explains, "Qasim a hill tribal belongs to a society where truly speaking there is no strict purdah but the isolated hills, the rigid code of honour, the strong sense of kinship act like purdah" (Jane, 1995, p217). The strict honour code of the Kohistani tribe against the milder code of seclusion of the plains in Lahore becomes evident through another incident when Qasim is

shocked at Nikka's question about his wife. Qasim makes it very clear that they do not talk about their wives, "look, he snarled nothing about my wife concerns you... you don't ask a hill-man anything about his womenfolk; I would have slit your throat" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.36). On the other hand, Nikka talks openly about his wife, "I have a wife. Does it offend you to hear me tell of my own womenfolk? ... She is barren" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.37). Nikka then discusses the probable causes of her barrenness, and comments on her health issues and Qasim silently blushes in return. As evident, both Qasim and Nikka operate within the purdah system with a different approach. Unlike Qasim, Nikka does not refrain from mentioning his wife to a strange man.

Sidhwa also highlights purdah through spatial segregation of homes in the plains of Lahore. As Zaitoon accompanies Miriam during her frequent visits to the neighbours' houses, she notes the inner parts of the houses were allocated to women:

Rooms with windows open to the street were allotted to the men: the dim maze of inner rooms to the women - a domain given over to procreation, female odours and the interminable care of children... Entering their dwellings was like stepping into gigantic wombs; the fecund, fetid worlds of mothers and babies. (*The Pakistani Bride*, pp.55-56)

The sexually segregated female spaces of the houses are closely associated with female sexuality, such as child bearing, nurturing and other domestic chores to be strictly kept within these quarters. Young girls, on the verge of adolescence are instructed in their roles of motherhood within these spaces. Zaitoon's entry into this adult world of segregation symbolically indicates her onset of puberty. After Zaitoon's onset of menstruation Miriam feels it pertinent to familiarise Zaitoon to the duties of women within Zananas. The young care free Zaitoon then becomes an important member of these segregated domains of the Muslim houses. Miriam is quick to recognise young Zaitoon's frequent belly pains as the sign of this upcoming womanhood. Like Ayah, with Lenny in *Ice Candy Man*, Miriam introduces and instructs Zaitoon about the complexities of the adult world. While Ayah influences Lenny unconsciously mostly unaware of how her acts of flirtations with varied men convey messages to the young Lenny, Miriam consciously takes the role of an instructor, mentor and guide for Zaitoon. From Miriam

Zaitoon learns not only the skills of housekeeping, but also discovers a whole new world centred on child bearing and nursing. Zaitoon further experiences a visible bodily change as she matures into a young woman. Like Lenny in *Ice Candy Man*, Zaitoon finds pleasure in exploring her body:

When she discovered the slight taut swell in her flesh – her promised womanhood... her eyes and fingers probed the enchanting novelty. The softness was delicious to the touch of her childish, inquisitive fingers ... this way and that ... pummelling and distorting. A wondrous, possessive pride welled up in her ... The incipient manifestation of breasts of her own filled her with ecstasy. She now longed each day for the privacy of her bath. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.232)

Zaitoon, a Muslim girl of purdah society, displays a similar childish pleasure in her developing body and sexuality as Lenny, a non-Muslim girl. However, there is a marked difference in how Lenny and Zaitoon are instructed and taught regarding their sexuality. Whereas Lenny is awakened to a bold understanding of sexuality through Ayah's love affairs, Zaitoon on the other hand is told to observe purdah as Miriam strictly forbids her to get in close contact with strange men. Further, Lenny has many sources to consult relating to her growing knowledge and curiosity about her developing body in particular and female sexuality in general, for example her neighbour Rosy, her cousin and Ayah. Zaitoon, on the other hand, receives only evasive answers from Miriam who considers it pertinent to guide her in household chores instead. The way Zaitoon is exposed to her sexuality reflects the element of purdah endorsed by Miriam where repression of sexual knowledge is considered part of modesty read as sharam (shame).

Furthermore, Lenny observes how Ayah's admirers physically touch her body, massaging and caressing Ayah, thereby introducing new possibilities of male and female physical contact, Zaitoon on the other hand is strictly told by Miriam to not let any man touch her and to keep her body covered. She further instructs, "you'll bleed every month... You are a woman now. Don't play with boys and don't let any man to touch you, this is why I wear a burka" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.55). Thus, Miriam combines the physical element of purdah with the repression of sexual knowledge as also a part of observing purdah and being modest. In other words, the more ignorant a young Muslim woman is towards



sexual matters the more innocent and pure she will be considered by her husband. The little information Zaitoon is provided with remains her only knowledge about female sexuality as she goes through bodily and emotional changes:

Brought up in a sexual vacuum she did not think of sex as good or bad – it merely did not exist. Neither Miriam, nor Qasim, nor any of the women she visited ever mentioned it. She floundered unenlightened in a morass of sexual yearning. Once, snuggled up to Miriam she had rocked her hips and Miriam had snapped, ‘Stop it!’ Zaitoon had felt surprised and hurt by the rebuke that put an end to her innocent pleasure. She had felt rejected. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.162)

Zaitoon’s lack of knowledge about her own body and sexuality is further highlighted when Sakhi, happy at his wife’s innocent ignorance, guides her through the process of consummation, “his heart welled with tenderness and pride at his bride’s obvious innocence. ‘Like this,’ he whispered, gently teaching her legs to separate” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.163). Zaitoon’s lack of knowledge about her sexuality is clearly appreciated by her husband who sees her sexual ignorance as the kind of modesty a virgin bride should display. Miriam instructs Zaitoon according to the male expectations of a modest woman unaware of her sexuality:

The sap that had risen in her since puberty and tormented her with indefinable cravings for so long surged to a feverish pitch. Brought up in a Muslim seclusion she had not understood the impulse that had caused her often to bury her face in Qasim’s clothes hanging from a nail. Breathing in their maleness she had glowed with happiness, taking her impulse to be a sign of deep affection. Knowing only Qasim and Nikka she had loved them with a mixture of filial devotion and vague unacknowledged sexual stirrings. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.161)

Thus, ignorance of sexual matters is associated with modesty read as sharam which, in turn, is associated with purdah. Modesty and sharam enjoins the female figures to be silent and obedient especially in matters relating to issues such as marriage. For example Afshan, Qasim’s wife who dies early in the novel, when asked about her consent to marriage remains quiet, “her head bowed beneath a voluminous red veil, she wept softly as befitted a bride. Thrice she was asked if she would accept Qasim as her husband and thrice an old aunt murmured ‘yes’ on her behalf” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.8). Afshan’s

silence is understood as her agreement announced publicly by an old aunt who speaks on her behalf. Though secretly excited about her marriage, Afshan maintains her silence as an act of modest behaviour. Her silence, a display of modesty and purdah, serves to strengthen the male domination over the female body and desire. By speaking on her behalf, the old aunt, apparently upholds the notion of modesty but examined closely she perpetuates the already suppressed voice of Afshan who is exchanged as a compensation between two men. In addition to silence taken as a symbol of agreement, a bodily gesture like a slight nod of the head or the further lowering of the bowed head are the other non-verbal expressions categorised as agreement. One of the dangers of depriving women of their voice, especially in regards to marriage, in the patriarchal society is that it can result in the bride being tricked into assenting. For example, as Zaman narrates:

Tales are told of how a bride, unwilling to accept a groom chosen for her has refused to murmur yes, however an old woman knowing that without the bride's verbal assent a Muslim marriage is not valid, pinches her. The soft exclamation of pain is then interpreted as assent. Other brides it is said, willing to accept their husband chosen for them but too modest to let any male hear their voice, have dropped a bunch of keys to signify their acceptance. (Zaman, 1995, p.159)

By keeping themselves unvoiced and repressing their desires the women thus perform within the male constructed notions of modesty and serve to further the exploitation of women under patriarchy. It is this self-imposed verbal and emotional repression under the guise of purdah that Sidhwa wants her female figures to break out of.

Zaitoon, also schooled in the concept of silence as part of modesty and purdah, similarly chooses to silently comply with her father's decision to marry her to his nephew in Kohistan. Consequently, Qasim and Zaitoon set off on their journey to the Mountains of Kohistan. As they stop for rest in an Army camp set up by Major Mushtaq, Zaitoon meets an American woman named Carol who is visiting the camp with her Pakistani husband. Carol, during her brief meeting with Zaitoon, notices her shy and modest behaviour in the company of strange men. She also learns of Zaitoon's upcoming marriage, as Qasim explains the reason of their visit to Kohistan before the Army Major. Carol excitedly

questions Zaitoon but Zaitoon becomes shy and modestly, “burrows her head so low that Mushtaq could barely see her nose” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.133). Carol is irritated as Farrukh, noting the situation, reprimands her for asking Zaitoon about her marriage in the presence of other men in the room. He explains, “Our women, particularly the young girls, are modest, you know” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.133). Farrukh appreciates Zaitoon’s silence as part of the modesty expected of women in a purdah society.

Unable to understand the ambiguous codes of modesty and sharam, Carol, the woman from the non-purdah society, replies furiously, “Really! One would imagine they achieved one of the highest birth rates in the world by immaculate conception!” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.133). Carol, already aware of the repressed yet sexually charged atmosphere of Pakistani society, due to her stay in Lahore, is unable to understand the double standards. On one hand, the Pakistani men around her expected Zaitoon to shy away and not discuss marriage and to observe modesty, on the other hand, Major Mushtaq often flirted with Carol without any remorse or guilt. She finds it difficult to understand why discussing marriage becomes a taboo before men when men like the Major have no qualms about sexually exploiting and sleeping with women. Sidhwa highlights how modest behaviour, as part of purdah, is strictly expected more from women in this patriarchal society where the rules and the boundaries defining purdah and morality rest with men. Qasim lowers his eyes before Nikka’s wife, therefore assigning respect, but both Qasim and Nikka have no qualms about visiting a prostitute and paying her to dance naked before them. As Jane (1995) comments, “living or dead, assertive or passive it is the men who are the centre of the novel, dividing property, siring children, violating women, indulging in polygamy or visiting prostitutes, they define the line of action and limit of purdah” (Jane, 1995, p.217). A similar attitude is displayed by the tribal men who like to keep their women restricted within the courtyards of their homes but boldly stare at Carol when they see her with the Major.

It is this injustice and male hypocrisy practiced, under the guise of purdah, that Sidhwa challenges. She shows how such double standards in defining different rules of purdah for men and women can lead to sexual repression in a society. This repression then manifests itself through gestures, behaviours and even penetrates and influences the

ways of thinking. Sidhwa illustrates this in the very next incident as Qasim and Zaitoon resume their journey towards their village. Major Mushtaq appoints one of the workers at his camp, Ashiq also referred to as the Punjabi Jawan, to accompany them across the bridge into their territory. As the three, after another long travel, rest at another army camp Zaitoon instantly becomes the centre of attention of nearly all the men around them. The site of a young woman arouses such interest that, “soldiers, drivers, overseers and tribals gathered outside the kitchen entrance and peeped in from a window” (*The Pakistani Bride* p.151). Qasim and Ashiq are both infuriated by their behaviour. Zaitoon’s vulnerability as a woman at risk of sexual harassment is highlighted to an alarming level as Qasim and Ashiq both struggle to protect Zaitoon from the mob’s lustful advances and gazes:

Infuriated by their avid, leering countenances, Ashiq impulsively reached for a full bucket by the sink and threw the water at them. The pyramid of craning necks and faces wobbled for a moment, then, swearing and jeering, the wet faces resumed their positions...‘I will deal with these mangy dogs’ snarled Qasim. ‘She has not come with the Jawan. She is my daughter!’ hissed Qasim. ‘I’ll wrench your tongues, you carrion. I’ll gouge the swinish eyes from your shameless faces’. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.152)

This clearly highlights one of the consequences of sexual repression. The Kohistani men instantly assume that Zaitoon, a dark skinned Punjabi girl, could not be Qasim’s daughter. They also assume that she has come with the Jawan, an outsider from the plains, and thus free to look at. One can clearly apprehend the fate of a woman who dares to venture alone in the mountains. This is accordingly shown by Sidhwa through Zaitoon’s rape by some tribal men whom she comes across during her escape. Zaitoon’s fate becomes inevitable as this predictable event had already been foreshadowed by Sidhwa, earlier on in the novel, in the incident where Qasim’s wife Afshan was almost raped by a passer-by as she bathed in the river. In this earlier incident Qasim manages to save his wife. In other words sexual repression within the mountainous tribe of Kohistan manifests an atmosphere of savage brutality where a man at home has unquestioned control over his women physically and sexually and any women who dares to transcend

the boundaries of their allotted domestic spaces, are punished by their men and often raped by strangers.

However, this does not mean that women are not sexually violated in the plains of Lahore, where purdah and modesty is operated through different means. The sexual repression also victimises women in the plains of Lahore where women are relatively free to venture into public spaces clad in burkas. For example, Nikka takes Qasim to the Hira Mandi and pays the dancing girl Shahnaz to dance naked before them. Interestingly, the dancing girl, Shahnaz sings of the safe confines of the purdah, which guards her from the lustful male gaze around her. Shahnaz pleads in the following words:

Oh, let me stay in Purdah - don't lift my veil.  
If my purdah is removed... my mystery is betrayed.  
Allah... forbid! Allah... forbid!  
My veil has ten thousand eyes.  
- Yet you cannot see into mine.  
But if you raise my veil even a bit -  
Beware! You'll burn.  
So... let me stay in purdah - don't lift my veil.

*(The Pakistani Bride, p.73)*

Shahnaz's song is ironically a plea to allow her to remain in purdah. Her appeal not to be 'unveiled' is a cry to the male figure to not cross their boundaries of modesty, not transgress into the realms of the female territory, the female body. She appeals to them to let her remain within the confines of her veil. To veil is to shield, to cover and prevent something from being seen. This arouses the 'desire to see' on the part of those from whom it is being hidden. As Zaman (1995) notes:

Shahnaz's song stresses the pretence both courtesans and their clients maintain as it does the charms associated with the purdah. The eroticism and the coyness, the repression and the mystery, the double perspectives of the purdah society, all these are contained in Shahnaz's song. (Zaman, 1995, p.164)

The mere covering of the female body is a reflection of its potential to be destructive, to which the female voice in the song alludes when she says, 'but if you raise my veil even a

bit - beware you'll burn'. This warning to the male figure is a reflection of something 'destructive' being confined within the boundaries of the veil, the exposure of which signals harm. However, to expose is to bring to knowledge and when a secret is brought to knowledge it ceases to be a secret and therefore loses its charm to allure its pursuer. The female voice is therefore pleading to not be exposed: she wishes to keep her mystery, her only treasure. Zaman further notes:

Purdah therefore while it hides also suggests the attractiveness of what is hidden. Women must be hidden because they are attractive to men. While the Quranic verses suggest that removing the veil will invite lust, Sidhwa suggests that removing the veil will in fact render women less attractive. It is this sense of mysterious loveliness that inspires the song of Shahnaz. (Zaman, 1995, p.165)

Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist and Islamic feminist, explains that Islamic theologians construe Muslim female sexuality as a source of fitna i.e. chaos due to which a strict regulation and control of the female body and sexuality (through purdah) is necessary for the wellbeing of a socially stable society. Mernissi (1987) points out:

In Western culture sexual inequality is based on the belief in the biological inferiority of women. In Islam it is the contrary: the whole system is based on the assumption that woman is a powerful dangerous being. All sexual institutions (polygamy, repudiation, sexual segregation) can be perceived as a strategy for constraining her power. (Mernissi, 1987, p.16)

The Islamic discourse regarding the chastity of women strongly emphasises the guarding of the senses, with special reference made to the gaze, the eyes or the ability to see. Thus Muslim women are instructed to observe purdah:

And say to the believing women that they caste down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers. (Quran Al-Hakim, 24:31, p.338)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> From the translation of the Holy Quran by Shakir, M, H. (2004) Quran Al-Hakim. New York: Tahrike Tarsile Quran, Inc. Elmhurst.

The casting down of the looks and the guarding of the gaze is the metaphorical representation of Purdah, as discussed before. The symbolic form of purdah includes covering the body with chador, odhni, dupatta, burqa or a scarf. Both forms of purdah complement each other and are equally important.

With regards to the male gaze, Ghazali asserts, “the eye is undoubtedly an erogenous zone in the Muslim structure of reality, just as able to give pleasure as the penis. A man can do as much damage to woman’s honour with his eyes as if he were to seize hold of her with his hands” (Cited in Mernissi, 1987, p.141). However, as Sidhwa also illustrates in her other novel, *Water* (2006) it is the male gaze that inserts the element of sexual attraction and lust to even apparently desexualised bodies of women. The scene in *Water* of the encounter between a widow Shakuntala and the priest Sadananda highlights the role of the male gaze in sexualising the (de-sexualised) body of the widow covered in a coarse sari. As Sadananda sees Shakuntala, while he stands on the steps of the Ghats, he does not see Shakuntala as a devoted woman, lost in spiritual thoughts and meditation, instead he sees, “a strong shapely body, a rounded flare of the hips, high breasts making shapely mounds and indentations of her collar bones in which he wishes to bury his lips” (*Water*, pp.156-157). As pointed out by Ghazali, Sadananda is clearly deriving pleasure through his gaze.

Sidhwa therefore, criticises the over-emphasis laid on the chastity of Muslim women through purdah as she clearly shows how the mere covering of the female body within the confines of clothes and walls fails to safeguard women in a world where men are capable of sexually objectifying women regardless of purdah. She further highlights the sexual exploitation of Carol at the hands of Major Mushtaq who similarly ‘sexualises’ her body through his male gaze wilfully misinterpreting Carol’s casual and friendly American ways, “his eyes barely glancing at her face, nibbled on the curves beneath her sweater” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.115). Sidhwa acknowledges the safe confines of purdah but through incidents such as those mentioned above she stresses the need for the Muslim men to guard their gazes also. She questions the Muslim society where women are expected to stay within the confines of their modest coverings, four walls and in the shadows of their men while men roam freely, gazing, leering, staring at any women in

sight. Nikka visits prostitutes and, disguised as a Hindu priest, impregnates childless Hindu women and the Major sleeps with Carol without any social stigma, guilt, punishment or remorse. Whereas men are pardoned for their sexual adventures, women are strictly policed, guarded and made solely responsible for social disruption.

Men in *The Pakistani Bride* exploit the custom of purdah to suit their interests. This exploitation renders purdah as a tool of patriarchal oppression for women. It renders purdah as merely female enclosures that begin to suffocate her and which need to be torn apart to assert individuality. Nilufer Bharucha (1998) in her article 'Inhabiting Enclosures and Creating Spaces: The Worlds of Women in Indian Literature in English' analyses novels by different women writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Dina Mehta, Attia Hosain and Gita Hariharan. These women writers belong to different ethno-religious backgrounds such as Parsi, Muslim and Hindu. Bharucha highlights how these women writers present their Parsi, Muslim and Hindu female characters living in male defined enclosures, which are both physical and metaphorical. Regarding Hindu and Muslim women she explains the doctrinal and scriptural force behind their physical enclosures and secondary status:

In Manusmriti<sup>10</sup>, women are presented as meek childlike creatures who have to be protected from their own waywardness - read as sexuality - by male control. A Hindu woman's 'laaj' is her ornament and a Muslim woman is bound within the enclosures of izzat (honour) and 'sharam' (shame). (Bharucha, 1998, p.100)

Bharucha acknowledges that Hariharan's Hindu women are not physically enclosed with the walls of zanas, like Hosain's Muslim women, but she reads their metaphorical confines as equally suffocating as, "they too peer out at the world from behind the confines of an odhni"<sup>11</sup> (Bharucha, 1998, p.101). She illustrates her point as follows:

My odhni three yards long  
With its corners four  
Four are the sides of my world

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<sup>10</sup> Manusmriti is one of the texts of Hindu religion. It is known as the divine code of conduct which lays out rules for men and women.

<sup>11</sup> An odhni is another name for a chador or dupatta, a piece of cloth, usually brightly coloured, used by women to cover themselves. Women in Pakistan and India usually use odhni to cover their head and upper body as a part of modest dressing.



The four corners  
Of the courtyard  
Between every two corners,  
A wall...  
Corners walled in  
The walls like a veil  
Suffocation inside the veil,  
Life suffocates.  
(Bharucha, 1998, p.101)

Sidhwa, unlike Bharucha, does not see female enclosures through purdah as sanctioned by religion to oppress women. Instead, as discussed before, it is the male exploitation of purdah and their failure to adhere to purdah which makes it oppressive for women. In other words as long as Muslim men continue to associate purdah solely with female sexuality and a code of practice only specified for women, and not play their part in safeguarding their gazes, then purdah is bound to lose its practical purpose in a society. Thus, Sidhwa allows some of her female characters to bravely challenge male oppression without discarding the purdah but able to transcend it. In other words, Sidhwa's women are capable of crossing the male defined boundaries of modesty to assert their views. Both Miriam and Zaitoon are shown to transgress the boundaries of purdah at certain points in the novel. Miriam transgresses purdah when she boldly steps out to confront Qasim about Zaitoon's proposed marriage in the hills:

Then a strange thing happened... Miriam, with only a chador over her head instead of the burka came out and sat down, with Qasim and Nikka, on the busy pavement... Then turning to Qasim, she addressed him as boldly as she might a woman in the privacy of her own rooms.  
(*The Pakistani Bride*, p.92)

This 'strange thing' as Zaitoon observes is the first example of Sidhwa's female characters in challenging the patriarchal structures and the transgression of purdah for purdah is not merely the physical covering of the body, but the requirement that women remain within the male allotted space, mostly the house. It demands that women avoid the public domain (especially unveiled) in the company of strange men. Further, purdah also means the obedience shown by women by avoiding any form of resistance by voice, gesture or action which could be understood as an immodest behaviour and a

transgression of purdah. Though Miriam does not succeed in persuading Qasim, she does not let purdah restrict her voice. She discusses the matter of Zaitoon's marriage and warns Qasim of Zaitoon's hardship in adjusting to the alien and harsh culture of Kohistan, "'Brother Qasim' she coaxed. 'How can a girl brought up in Lahore be happy in the mountains? Tribals are different; they are savages, uncouth and ignorant! She will be miserable among them. Don't you see?'" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.93). Thus, Miriam proves herself as a woman who is well aware of cultural differences and, unlike Qasim, is able to foresee the difficulty that Zaitoon would face in the new environment. She is able to think independently and to be assertive about her opinion.

Even the young Zaitoon musters up the courage to dissuade her father from marrying her with Sakhi, shortly after reaching Kohistan, as she witnesses the alien, remote and secluded lifestyles of Kohistani people who ate dried bread and lived in round shaped mud huts, "'Abba,' she begged in a fierce whisper, 'take me back. If I must marry, marry me to someone from the plains. That Jawan at the camp, Abba, I think he likes me'... Qasim was furious. He was shocked by her brazen choice of words" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.157). Zaitoon, though innocently, transgresses the male defined limits of modest behaviour and suggests to her father that he marry her to the Jawan. She also fails to dissuade Qasim who, "wrenched at her slender, clinging fingers and pushed her away. 'Hush, Zaitoon, that's no way to speak to your father. It is not seemingly. A decent girl does not tell her father to whom he should marry her'" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.158). However, Miriam and Zaitoon defy the image of women bound by the enclosures of sharam and purdah but their failure to persuade Qasim also highlights the strength of patriarchal structures which are not always easy to break.

Sidhwa reveals how the spatially and sexually segregated Muslim society creates an atmosphere of sexual repression. In other words, sexual segregation breeds an atmosphere of repressed sexuality. Carol immediately notes and feels the segregated atmosphere of Pakistani society as charged with covert and implicit sexual tension:

Slowly Carol had begun to realise that even among her friends, where the wives did not wear burkhas or live in special, women's quarters, the general separation of the sexes bred an atmosphere of sensuality. The

people seemed to absorb it from the air they breathed. This sensuality charged every encounter, no matter how trivial. She was not immune. Her body was sometimes reduced to a craving mass of flesh...It was like being compelled to fast at a banquet. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.112)

Carol becomes a victim of this 'sexual repression' in multiple ways. Firstly, she falls prey to the Major's sexual stirrings only to discover later that her body was only an 'object of desire' for the Major when he shows his inability to marry her. Secondly, as she is out touring with the Major and enters into the tribal territory across the bridge, the tribal men throw stones at them and mockingly stare at her unveiled body. Their mocking glances render Carol selfless something not human as she recounts:

The tribal's eyes shifted and skewered the woman in ruthless speculation. For the first time Carol knew the dizzy, humiliating slap of pure terror. The obscene stare stripped her of her identity. She was a cow, a female monkey, a gender opposed to that of a man – charmless, faceless, and exploitable. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.120)

Thirdly, and most important of all, she becomes an object of her husband's possessive jealousy. Born and bred in a sexually repressive society, Farrukh interprets his wife's American ways as expressions of sexual desire especially towards other men. In a purdah society where directly looking into a strange man's eyes carries sexual connotations, Carol's laughter and friendly conversations and her 'touching' other men drive Farrukh to the brink of madness, "I am so ashamed of you... You laugh too loudly. You touch men. Don't you know if you only look a man in the eye it means he can have you?" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.108). Farrukh does not physically torture his wife, but the mental and emotional abuse he puts her through clearly reflects his embedded sense of insecurity. Farrukh and Carol's marriage becomes more difficult with every passing day as Carol strives not to provoke Farrukh's jealousy but in vain as Farrukh suspects her endlessly:

Always in the mad mornings, noons and nights, put-putting through the crackle of the phone, between the lines of a letter, his insatiable suspicions... 'Then what happened?' Farrukh would say. 'I told you he tried to touch me'. 'Where?' 'You know where.' 'Like this?' His hands would crawl up, hurting her, 'like this?' 'Yes. Stop it! I told you I hated it. I slapped him'. 'You are lying. You enjoyed it every bit of it. Most likely you encouraged him. You welcomed him. You devoured him. You

opened your arms wide thrusting out your pink tits!" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.110)

Whereas Carol becomes a victim of Farrukh's madness, Farrukh himself is torn apart between wanting to believe Carol yet driven into suspiciousness as he is forced to judge his wife's actions according to the sexually repressed social attitudes of his culture. At one point he screams in agony, "'Insane? I am insane? If I am it's because I don't know what to believe. You are driving me mad'. Farrukh pulled his long fine hair and little tufts of it came off in his fists" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.111). Farrukh's confusion is actually rooted in Carol's inability to accept and mould into the purdah culture. He knows full well that Carol's friendly gestures would be misread as sexual invitations. He belongs to a society where women are placed in two extreme positions of either 'virtuous' women (read as modest), both in dress and behaviour or 'prostitutes', immodestly dressed and schooled in the art of chatting with men. Thus, sexual repression creates such extreme opposites in patriarchal societies which allow no room for casual and friendly conversations or pleasantries between unrelated men and women.

The repressed sexuality works to the disadvantage of both men and women. This is further exemplified through Zaitoon and Sakhi's marriage which too becomes problematic as Sakhi is encouraged to be a real man by controlling his woman (wife). Sakhi disapproves and punishes Zaitoon for talking to the Punjabi Jawan, as Sakhi was secretly watching as Qasim, Zaitoon and the Jawan made their way into his territory:

Sakhi was seething with jealousy...the Jawan's grip on the girl's arm, her laughter and ease in his company - the persistent vision inflamed him. 'Why did you let him touch you?' He hissed, turning dangerously. 'I saw you,' he shouted, 'I saw the Jawan hold your arm all the way down the river'. Sakhi's face was contorted with fury. 'You laughed together as if you were lovers. I could hear you all the way across the river', cried Sakhi, burying his face in his hands. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.165)

Zaitoon surprised and shocked at Sakhi's reaction realises that even minor interactions with the opposite sex in Sakhi's world carry sexual connotations. The anger and frustration behind Sakhi's attitude towards his wife rests on the strict tribal code and the importance laid on the chastity of women by the tribal, Kohistani, Muslim males. Sakhi is

merely a child learning the codes of honour and shame, in a society where sexual segregation and repression leads the men to look at women with suspicion. This sexual repression fills Sakhi with the conflicting emotions of curiosity and possessiveness as he expresses aggressive joy at finally having his own woman:

Sakhi surveyed his diffident bride with mounting excitement. Here was a woman all his own, he thought with proprietorial lust and pride. Zaitoon looked at him wildly, terrified as he dragged her up and roughly yanked her red satin shirt over her head. Her arms flew to cover her breasts. He tugged at the cord of her shalwar and the silk fell to her ankles. He had never seen a wholly naked woman before. He registered her astonishing female desirability...the round out-thrusting breasts. He admired her lean string thighs and his eyes were drawn to the curling jet hair that peeped rebelliously through protective fingers. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.161)

Unable to understand the nature of the events that follow, Zaitoon tries to resist but Sakhi further asserts his ownership over her body in the following words, “Why not? It’s my cunt!’ he breathed” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.162). Further Sakhi’s possessive jealousy is displayed on several occasions in the form of physical violence. Like Farrukh, Sakhi understands his wife’s friendly gestures as immodest and sexually inviting. As once when Zaitoon is out in the Mountains searching for firewood as part of her daily chores, she waves at the passing jeep of army officers. Sakhi who happens to witness this incident is furious, “‘You whore’ he hissed ...He cleared his throat and spat full in her face. ‘You dirty, black little bitch, waving at those pigs...You wanted him to stop and fuck you, didn’t you!’” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.185). Both Sakhi and Farrukh suspect their wives and whereas Farrukh refrains from intense violence, Sakhi proves more brutal towards Zaitoon, “He slapped her hard, and swinging her pitilessly by the arm, as a child swings a doll, he flung her from him... He aimed a swift kick between her legs, and she fell back. Sakhi kicked her again and again and pain stabbed through her” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.186). This sense of being suspected of immoral behaviour, untrusting gazes and constant surveillance lead Zaitoon and Carol to question their identity – as Carol expresses, “She hated what it had done to her. It had corroded her innocence, stripped her layer by layer, of civilised American niceties. She was frightened to see a part of

herself change into a hideously vulgar person” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.111). Provoked to the extreme, Carol avenges Farrukh by having a sexual affair with Major Mushtaq.

Zaitoon also finds herself, body, and identity in jeopardy. She also experiences the change brought in her behaviour as a result of Sakhi’s unpredictable attitudes, “At times he was kind, but these exceptions were followed by needless severity. He beat her on the slightest pretext. She now lived only to placate him, keeping her head averted unless it was to listen to a command” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.174). Just as Farrukh’s endless mistrust in Carol strips her of her innocence, turning her, in her own mind, into a vulgar person, Sakhi’s constant brutality and mistrust in Zaitoon also lead her to question her identity which is evident throughout the novel.

Nikka questions whether she is the real daughter of Qasim as her slightly darker skin, does not show the bright, fair and light complexion of Qasim. Similarly, Carol is also suspicious of Zaitoon’s relationship with Qasim as their skin colours do not agree. Zaitoon’s identity remains ambiguous and unclear throughout the novel. When she learns that Qasim is not her real father, she voices her lack of belonging to any place or person, “but Abba (father), I am not of the hills. I am not of your tribe. I am not even yours” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.140). Though painful, Zaitoon’s insight is a reflection of not only her ‘un-belonging’ but it also reflects the lack of connectedness that Carol experiences, torn apart between two worlds, two cultures, two nations and two ways of life. Hamida, too shares her pitiful condition of feeling like a stranger amidst her very own people. When her body was young, it was worth a high price; however time, hard labour, multiple births and disease had eroded her body reducing it to a used and expired mass of flesh. She feels estranged amongst her own people. Zaitoon, Carol and Hamida’s feelings of alienation lies in their mistreatment at the hands of various men in their lives. The patriarchal injustice and harshness that these women bear, through their bodies, alienates them from their own bodies.

Zaitoon has no option but to risk running away. Zaitoon understands that Kohistani people seldom spare women who show any sign of resistance. As she previously witnesses how Sakhi beats his own mother for merely stopping him from beating an

animal, “‘I’ll teach you,’ he hissed, ‘I’ll teach you meddling women’. Hamida cowered under the raised stick. The blow hit her shoulders. She scrambled like a crab down the sloping terrain” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.172). Zaitoon foresees her own bitter future awaiting her when she witnesses Sakhi beating his mother. The tortured body of her mother-in-law allows her to foresee that years of subordination, silent obedience and service to the honour-crazy tribal men would not be enough to earn her a respectable place. Instead she would labour hard, day and night till her body withered, old and grey, like the body of her mother-in-law, as she Zaitoon notes:

She had been tall, but arthritis and hard labour had bent her... Deep scars on Hamida’s cheeks distended her toothless mouth in a curious grin. Old at forty, she had suffered a malicious disease that had shrunk strips of her skin and stamped her face with a perennial grimace. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.156)

Like Farrukh, Sakhi too is driven to madness and rage as ‘controlling’ his wife becomes a challenge for him. Further, Zaitoon’s escape subjects Sakhi to the most tormenting of situations as hunting and killing her becomes necessary to assuage the shame she brings on Sakhi’s tribe and his manhood, “torn by a sense of shame and failure Sakhi slid to the ledge floor. Burying his face in the dusty folds of his jacket, he broke into furious weeping” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.200). Zaitoon, by running away, transgresses the male allotted space which is not always looked upon as favourably in a male dominated world as Vasanthakumari (2008) asserts, “space is something women yearn for very dearly. They are not the ones who gain much space by the nature of the society. In the early Indian fiction women who cherished space usually became an outcaste or suffered verily for her desired release” (Vasanthakumari, 2008, p.114). Zaitoon in her attempt to transgress the male allotted space of her husband’s house not only runs the risk of getting killed but is raped by some tribal men who find her near the river. Sidhwa, as mentioned earlier, shows how the patriarchal world is full of dangers especially for women who dare to challenge and resist the male defined rules of the patriarchal world. Christine Schlote (2008) analysing Rukhsana Ahmad’s novel *The Hope Chest* (1991) suggests that, “Pakistani women’s lives are seemingly determined and confined by restrictive spaces from which there is hardly any escape” (Schlote, 2008, p.168). As the

physical spaces of their 'homes' and 'bodies' become more restrictive, Schlote describes how each female character, "determined by their gendered bodies as the main sites' embark on an assertion of their identity, whether illustrated by their experience of sexual awakening, resistance and subjection or physical and psychological illness"( Schlote, 2008, p.167). Similarly, in *The Pakistani Bride* for Zaitoon to assert her identity and control over her body she has to leave Sakhi's home. According to Doreen Massey (1994):

The home may be as much a place of conflict as of repose...Many have had to leave home precisely in order to forge their own versions of their identities...More over in certain cultural quarters, the mobility of women does indeed seem to pose a threat to a settled patriarchal order...That place called home was never an unmediated experience. (Massey, 1994, p.11)

Zaitoon's escape from her husband's home therefore poses a direct threat to 'a settled patriarchal order' of Sakhi's tribe. The mountains, through which Zaitoon has to find her way, reflect a similar harshness and brutality as its Kohistani inhabitants. The Army men across the bridge worked fast to carve the wild mountains into roads and bridges to communicate and travel across as Qasim notes, "Qasim had heard of the new road, yet to see it hewn into the cliffs and wind like a tape-worm through the mountains-fast sanctuary of his youth, galled him. They were creeping up, these people from the plains: penetrating remote valleys" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.100). As these men from the plains continue hacking into the mountains taming their wildness, the mountains seemed to resist in their peculiar ways. As the Major proudly flaunts the remarkable construction of Karakoram Highway to Farrukh, he also details the loss they had to bear, "We've lost men - dynamites, avalanches, landslides, sudden crazy winds that lift men off the ledges" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.127). The mountainous range across the bridge that surrounded the ungoverned territory of Sakhi's and many other Kohistani tribes is the range of mountains that Zaitoon has to survive through and cross the bridge into the governed territory, under the Army control. The mountains, as unforgiving as the Kohistani tribes, symbolically represent the rigid patriarchal Kohistani ways of life that Zaitoon has to battle through and Zaitoon soon realises that she is up against two enemies, Sakhi's tribe and the mountains.



As she stumbles through the mountains she comes across an old and diseased vulture. This ugly looking, carnivorous creature fills Zaitoon with utter disgust and as if challenging her husband Sakhi to come and tear her flesh to pieces, she stands up boldly, almost screaming at the animal, “‘you want to eat me? You want to eat me?’ Cried Zaitoon ‘I am alive...look I am alive!’” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.208). Zaitoon verbally challenges Sakhi as she sees the diseased body of the vulture as metaphorically presenting Kohistani men, shackled in their rigid codes of honour, feeding on female flesh. Similarly, as she watches her husband, her sons and the other tribal men silently prepare for Zaitoon’s hunt, Hamida, trembles in fearful anticipation and bitterly laments:

Everything for honour – and another life lost! The old woman was overcome by the memory of her three dead sons: the weight of each child in her body for nine months, the excruciating pain, drudgery, sweat: and scant years later, the heartbreak when, one by one, each of her sons was carried home on a crude stretcher swinging from the men’s shoulders... Men and honour. And now this girl... (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.191)

Hamid’s lament clearly reflects her bodily exploitations at the hands of her men. She seems to have no right over her own children whom she carried in her womb (body) and laboured to nurture. Her body was ‘used’ to produce offspring for her men. Women, for these men, were nothing more than bodies to be closely guarded, and commodities to be bartered, exchanged and killed at any time to assuage their male ego and honour. Hamida silently resists her bodily objectification as her bitter memories fill her with hatred, “‘Hamida, who had been so proud and valiant and wholeheartedly subservient to the ruthless code of her forebears, now loathed it with all her heart” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.191). Zaitoon also refuses to play part in this bodily objectification at the hands of tribal men and as she drags her body through the lethal escape she chides it, “‘oh stop moaning’, she told her stumbling legs in exasperation. ‘Come on. Move’...her body was to serve her only one purpose: to convey her to the bridge at Dubair” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.209). Her body assumes a challenge for her as she battles with herself. Makarand Paranjape (1996), on Zaitoon’s resistance, comments:

Zaitoon is a symbol not only of a woman fighting oppression in Pakistan but of the human spirit struggling against all physical odds to survive and maintain its integrity. Zaitoon represents 'khudi' or the mental and spiritual strength of human kind, indefatigable, indomitable and irrepressible. She represents the triumph of mind over matter, of spirit over flesh. (Paranjape, 1996, p.105)

Raped and tortured Zaitoon manages to make her way to the bridge where her husband with his tribe is also searching for her. Luckily she manages to see the Major from behind a rock where she was hiding and calls for help. The army Major, astonished to find Zaitoon, is keen to help yet realises the close presence of Sakhi. As Sakhi wanders off a little further, the Major wraps up Zaitoon, like a bundle in her blanket and his jacket, and carries her across the bridge into his territory, "he lifted her huddled in a natal curl in the blanket" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.239). The Major carries her folded within her chador/blanket like a bundle of clothes, roots, herbs or a stone. Sidhwa uses the covering of the veil to save Zaitoon's life. Similarly, on a previous occasion, Zaitoon is playfully shown to veil herself completely in Miriam's burka as she passes by Qasim. He is unable to recognise his daughter. This earlier playful incident proves to be a prophetic image which at the end of the novel gains the utmost significance, as Zaitoon is again able to pass by Sakhi unnoticed. The blanket offered Zaitoon the 'space' to escape the male gaze for if Sakhi's eyes had fallen on her body she would surely have been murdered. Here Sidhwa acknowledges that purdah can provide a safe enclosure for the female figure, which allows the female figure 'a space of her own'.

Sidhwa sums up her female characters' struggle for their identity through Allama Iqbal's<sup>12</sup> concept of *khudi*<sup>13</sup>. *Khudi* is a philosophical idea which requires an individual to strive for self-assertion towards the betterment of one's life by rejecting and resisting oppression. Geeta Patel (2001) explains that, "khudi is derived from 'khud' [self] and can be translated as 'self' or 'identity', but its primary meaning is 'self', standing for myself, yourself and so on" (Patel, 2001, p.206). Sidhwa's message for her female characters is to

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<sup>12</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) is Pakistan's National Poet. This verse is taken from Iqbal's poem 'khudi ko ker buland itna' which encodes a message for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. Allama Muhammad Iqbal conceived the idea of Pakistan and his poetry is philosophical in nature aimed at the Muslim youth, emphasising the exercising of inner strength.

<sup>13</sup> Allama Iqbal presented the idea of *khudi* in his book *Isra-e-khudi*.

resist against male oppression for the betterment of their lives and the assertion of their identity through exercising khudi. Thus, khudi can be understood as the realisation of an inner strength, power and ability to face, challenge and overcome the obstacles in life. Sidhwa's Zaitoon is shown to exercise her inner strength when she battles with her body as if asking her khudi to raise itself, to free itself from the material confines of her flesh/body and allow her strength to direct the course of her own life. Regardless of whether she would survive or not she makes an attempt, which constitutes the implicit message Sidhwa tries to convey. In the real incident, on which Sidhwa based this novel, the bride was hunted down by her husband and killed. Sidhwa in this novel, allows the bride (in the character of Zaitoon) to survive.

Sidhwa's conscious effort in allowing the girl to survive reflects her ardent desire to bring forth the significance of 'exercising khudi'. Fawzia Afzal-Khan (1991) notes, "She [Sidhwa] endorses the young woman's resolution and, by analogy, endorses a challenge to the strictures of patriarchy" (Afzal-khan, 1991, p.274). Sidhwa, however, does not underestimate the danger of this, as shown by her retention of the real incident of a woman's head floating in the river which Carol comes across when she is on a walk with Farrukh. On seeing a part of a woman's body floating in the water, Farrukh casually informs Carol, "she probably asked for it" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.224). Farrukh's comment assumes the form of a question that Carol endlessly debates as she asks herself:

Women the world over, through the ages asked to be murdered, raped, exploited, enslaved, to get importunately impregnated, beaten-up, bullied and disinherited. It was an immutable law of nature. What had the tribal girl done to deserve such grotesque retribution? (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.226)

The more Carol thinks about Farrukh's remark the more she realises the vulnerability of women, especially in Pakistani society where, both in Lahore and amongst the tribal people, women were used for the services of their men. Carol decides to leave for her country and wishes she could help Zaitoon in any way possible to survive her escape

which Carol admires greatly. She asks Farrukh to translate the verse by Iqbal she had heard earlier:

*Khudi ko ker buland itna,  
Heighten your khudi to such majesty,  
Ke her takdeer sy pahaylay  
that before every turn of fate  
Khuda banday say khud poochay,  
God himself asks man-  
'Buta teri raza kya hai?'*  
'Tell me, what do you wish?'

*(The Pakistani Bride, p.229)*

After she listens to the translation of Iqbal's poem she is convinced that Zaitoon would survive, "I think she forced her destiny; exercised her 'khudi'. I am sure she'll make it" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.229). By emphasising the need to discover the inner strength of her characters, Sidhwa appeals to the oppressed female figure to not allow their physical coverings and their purdah to shroud their mental faculty and voice. Unlike Baskaran and Kathiresan (2008) who in *The Feminist Study of Poems of Imtiaz Dharker* present a rather harsh picture of purdah claiming it as, "a terrible weapon used against women, a door which locks and an iron curtain drawn between herself and the society" (Baskaran and Kathiresan, 2008, p.30). Sidhwa follows a more neutral approach. Instead of criticising purdah she points to the problems experienced by women of the purdah society, thereby inserting into the discussion a greater complexity. In other words, Sidhwa highlights that purdah itself is not a 'terrible weapon' but the male inability to adhere to purdah, yet their desire to define rules of behaviour for women, under the guise of purdah and modesty, leads to the exploitation of women at the hands of their men. She cautions the women of the purdah society to not allow their physical coverings to overshadow their identity and urges women to stand up for themselves. Thus, as Zaitoon and Carol realise that their bodily exploitations, at the hands of their men and those around them, is proving to be destructive to their sense of self and dignity they refuse to acquiesce. Just as Ayah and Lenny refuse to succumb to the patriarchal manipulations of their bodies and are galvanised into action against their oppression. Thus, Sidhwa, in both of her novels, *Ice Candy Man* and *The Pakistani Bride* highlights the patriarchal grip

on women's bodies and sexuality through multiple means which directly affects their lives. The female figures realise this exploitation and make efforts to break through these patriarchal barriers and assert their ownership over their bodies and sexualities. Such resistance, as Sidhwa points out, is not welcomed in a society that believes in the subordination of women but nevertheless, through Zaitoon's, Carol, Ayah's successful survival, Sidhwa endorses the importance of resistance, self-worth and self-assertion.

### Chapter no. 3

#### **Honour, Female Body and Sexuality in Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman***

‘Here I stand before you, Mother, my father’s Shahzadi Ibadat’. She spread her hands in a flourish. ‘The Holy Woman. The woman he created by killing me. Did you not know that men are the true creators in our culture, Mother? They mould our lives and destinies according to their whims and desires’. (*The Holy Woman*, p.88)

*The Holy Woman*, by Qaisra Shahraz, encapsulates the restrictions on the lives of women living under patriarchy. *The Holy Woman* highlights how the powerful social structures and feudal customs, centred on female body and sexuality, restrict women and are difficult to challenge. These customs and tradition are often nurtured, strengthened and kept alive through violent and unjust actions centred on women. This chapter shows how the female body is associated with cultural traditions, such as honour, to lay claims to female sexuality. The chapter also explores how female figures within the family structures are helplessly trapped and forced to comply with the patriarchal male who enforces female subordination. Shahraz’s female figures, like Sidhwa’s, find their bodies and sexualities as a means of exploitation which possess a threat to their female identity. Sidhwa’s characters show an overt resistance and challenge to male authority whereas Shahraz highlights the restrictive family structures that bind women into submission, who passively accept their fate with little resistance. The chapter focuses on female sexuality, as Zari Bano is denied her right to marriage, when her father enforces a feudal custom. Consequently, Zari Bano’s modern and secular life style is replaced by purdah and religious devotion. Zari Bano’s successful spiritual and emotional journey to discover a new identity, of a veiled Muslim woman, is rewarded by the reinstatement of her right to marriage. *The Holy Woman* reveals male domination over female bodies and sexuality and, as this chapter demonstrates, women remain bound within male-constructed boundaries of piety and honour whereas men hold the ultimate deciding power.

*The Holy Woman* is centred on Zari Bano, an educated and wealthy woman, who becomes the victim of a feudal custom. The twenty seven year old Zari Bano, a university graduate and an active feminist (she is a member of the woman's organisation based at her university which is headed by her professor Nighat) is emotionally pressurised by her father to marry the Holy Quran and become a Holy Woman<sup>14</sup>. Her father Habib Khan, a feudal lord, makes this cruel decision following the unexpected death of his only son, the heir of the family. Zari Bano reluctantly accepts her new role and travels abroad to gain higher education. The plot attains its climax as her younger sister, Ruby, accepts an arranged marriage with Sikandar, the man Zari Bano loves. This marriage is short lived as Ruby and her father both tragically die during the Holy pilgrimage in Mecca. Towards the end of the novel, Zari Bano is again emotionally pressurised to marry Sikandar in order to mother her orphaned nephew Harris. Whereas Qasim in *The Pakistani Bride*, asserts control over his adopted daughter Zaitoon's sexuality by marrying her for his own interests, Habib asserts his control by denying his daughter the choice of marriage. In both cases, female sexuality is called to the sacrificial altar to be slaughtered in the interest of male whims and fancies.

This novel is based in Karachi in the Sindh province and captures one of the many brutal customs often practiced in this province but also more generally across Pakistan. Zari Bano belongs to a wealthy and land owning family of Sindh with access to education. The strict regulations of purdah are also eased for Zari Bano as she has the luxury of private transport. Geographically, Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* is based in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) where, as in Baluchistan, "life is strictly governed by a rigid code of tribal beliefs and patterns of behaviour...A woman has no say in any aspect of her own life, including her marriage, and once betrothed belongs exclusively to her husband's family" (Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987, p.21). Shahraz bases both of her novels, *The Holy Woman* and *Typhoon*, in the Sindh province where life for women may seem slightly less restricted or in other words patriarchy manifests itself in a different colour

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<sup>14</sup> An old tradition mostly practiced among the feudal lords of the Sindh province in Pakistan. According to this tradition the woman (daughter, sister) is married to the Holy book, Quran through a formal ceremony after which the woman has to remain celibate, non-sexual and devote her life to religious preaching and learning. The main purpose behind this tradition is to prevent the family property dividing and going out of the family through the daughters. This tradition which is carried out in the name of religion is actually against the Islamic teachings, as Islam discourages celibacy.

and shade. Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* captures a tribal system and Shahrāz's *The Holy Woman* presents women caught in a feudal system. Generally defined, a feudal system includes certain land owning families across Pakistan, more specifically in the rural Sindh and NWFP province, who have established their power through the possession of hundreds of acres of land. These feudal lords exercise great power and authority both politically and religiously. This power also includes the authority over women's bodies and sexuality exercised through, "traditions [which] inform and control women's lives from birth to death" (Katrak, 2006, p.208). These traditions are mostly implemented through marriage transactions between two men or two communities. In some cases marriage transitions control the lives of women even before they are born as Nafisa Shah (1997) explains:

In exchange marriages if women of productive age are not available pledges are made in a custom called *paith likhi diyan* (to pledge a pregnancy) in which a woman not yet born is pledged into marriage in the exchange. In upper Sindh, especially Larkana, the father who makes the transactions prefers to charge half the money for his daughter in bride price and the other half is charged as a *Sangh* (Sindhi: Marriage contract). The same daughter will return a daughter, born to her, to the father who would then pass on the girl to his agnates (paternal relatives) in the exchange deal. (Shah, 1997, p.34)

Whereas women are bartered, through marriage, for materialistic gains, the land owning feudal lords of Sindh also restrict and deny marriage through a traditional custom named *Haq Bakshish* which Shahrāz describes in this novel. As the title indicates the Holy Woman is a woman who goes through the ceremony of *Haq Bakshish* to become a *Shahzadi Ibadat* meaning princess of worship or, as Shahrāz calls it, a Holy Woman. The custom of marriage with the Quran is mostly practiced in the Sindh province. Uzma Mazhar (2003) in 'The Friday Times of Pakistan' (Pakistani weekly newspaper) reports:

According to Khabrain, a large number of feudals in Sindh had married their daughters to the Quran. The ceremony took place after the girl of the family was asked to take a bath, after which a Quran was put before her as the men folk apologized to her for the ritual which would condemn the girl never to get married but to read the Quran every day. In Sindh, Shabbir Shah's sister, ex-minister Murad Shah's sister and two daughters, three daughters of Mir Awwal Shah of Mattiari, daughters



and sisters of Sardar Dadan and Nur Khan of the Lund tribe, nieces of Sardar Ghulam of Maher tribe, and the daughters of the Pir of Bharchundi Sharif, were all married to the Quran to prevent their share of the land going to them and thus avoid redistribution of land. (Mazhar, 2003)

Habib Khan, Zari Bano's father, is presented as a feudal lord who victimises his daughter to save his acres of land, by marrying her to the Quran. Zari Bano who lives in the cosmopolitan city of Karachi and attends a co-educational university is bound to comply with this misogynist feudal custom, which proves that despite wealth and education, her life is no different to many other illiterate women living in the shadows of their male guardians. According to Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987):

Whether a Pakistani woman belongs to the elite or the toiling masses, whether she lives in the remote villages of the tribal areas cut from change, or in the dynamic environment of Karachi, her life is governed by the same rules of patriarchy which cut across class and regional differences to create some measures of uniformity and similarity. (Mumtaz and Shaheen, 1987, p.23)

Sidhwa and Shahraz's female characters are women of different origins and backgrounds, ages, and socio-economic status but they all experience a similar sense of entrapment within the patriarchal structures of their society. Sidhwa's Zaitoon, in *The Pakistani Bride*, who runs away from her abusive husband, has to be hunted down and killed as her escape is a challenge to Sakhi's tribal honour. Similarly, Shahraz's Zari Bano has to live as a 'Holy Woman' to save the family honour and property. Through both life and death, the women are made to offer (bodily) sacrifices to uphold the family honour and values. The present chapter explores how these traditional customs silence women transforming them into passive victims, restricted within their family to perform roles that helplessly bind them to comply and even support the patriarchal structures.

Zari Bano's mother is devastated at the idea of her daughter becoming a Holy Woman but is helpless, as she expresses it, "I am a mother, but a traitor" (*The Holy Woman*, p.70). Furthermore, Shahzada's relationship with her husband, from the very beginning of her married life, remains punctuated by fears and anxieties. The fear of losing her husband

and the anxiety of being disposed of by her family remains with her throughout the novel. The earlier years of her married life were governed by confusion and feeling of a lack of belonging where Shahzada feared that her husband may not like her and might decide to take a new wife, “the fear of losing him to someone else only left me in the later years of my life when I had a growing family” (*The Holy Woman*, p.444). Wifehood is thus an unstable position, defined by uncertainty, which has to be replaced by ‘motherhood’. However, it is often observed that a sense of insecurity still remains, following the transition to motherhood, in women who then fear the dispossession of their family and children.

Lisa Lau Ee Jia (2003) highlights a similar interplay of fear and anxiety presented through the female characters in Indian fiction. Jia describes how Roop, the main character of Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* (1999), portrays a fearful woman always afraid of being dispossessed. Jia further describes that even her successful survival of the partition riots and her efforts to keep her children and her female servant safe from any harm, as she flees to Delhi, fails, in Jia’s words, “to raise the notion in her mind that she was a capable woman able to stand alone and more to defend and protect others under her care” (Jia, 2003, p.357). On the contrary, Roop remains full of fears, as Jia concludes:

At every juncture of her life, she faced the possible threat of dispossession, all types of dispossession and these fears haunt her all her life. In her youth, she feared belonging to no one, and to no place, if she is not married. As a young mother, she discovered that even her children could be taken away from her. As a second wife, she feared for her life at the hands of her husband’s first wife. Returning to her father for sanctuary, she even had to fear that her husband would not give his name to his children. Later, established as her husband’s only wife (after the death of the first wife), and the mother of three children, Roop feared her husband’s death. (Jia, 2003, p.375)

A similar threat of dispossession is reflected in the character of Shahzada who considers her husband superior in all regards. Shahzada is dependent on her husband in variety of ways. Her husband’s social status, power and prestige, as a feudal landlord, bind her to obey him. She makes a verbal pledge to support her husband, “I will never forgive you,

but I will do my best to support you in everything, as it is my duty” (*The Holy Woman*, p.71). Shahzada’s obedient behaviour further strengthens the patriarchal structures that work against the interest of women. Her threat to ‘never forgive her husband’ and expressions of sorrow and grief only add poignancy to her impotency. She points to her marginalised position in deciding family matters as she debates with her husband, “I am just a puppet, a mere worthless woman to do your bidding. What choice do I have? I can only swing and dance along in whichever direction you pull and manoeuvre my strings” (*The Holy Woman*, p.71). Female figures in *The Holy Woman* share their grief and sorrows as they collectively lament each other’s pains and celebrate their pleasures.

Zari Bano’s grief is collectively bemoaned by her mother, sister and even her cousin Gulshan. Yet, while women join together in a shared sense of sympathy and understanding of each other’s pain, they fail to provide any real help to Zari Bano. The little resistance displayed by the mother is quickly crushed by Habib, “silence! You stupid, stupid woman... You don’t know what you are saying” (*The Holy Woman*, p.161). She is told to remain silent, in fact, kept in continued silence by not being allowed to speak. When little can be done to save her daughter, Shahzada emotionally withdraws from her husband, the only form of resistance women in patriarchal cultures usually use. The little power Shahzada gains by emotionally distancing herself from her husband proves futile, as her behaviour is ignored by Habib. As David Ghanim (2009) explains:

Patriarchy tends to tolerate female power as long as foundations of the patriarchal gender structure remain intact. Within the patriarchal structure, female power can take the form of resistance, subversion or compliance, without implying that these are mutually exclusive. By cultivating female power women play an essential role in supporting the endurance of patriarchal social structures. (Ghanim, 2009, p.12)

Shahzada also turns to Allah for help as Habib, “noted the length of time she had spent in saying her personal prayers -her dua- to Allah” (*The Holy Woman*, p.71). As pointed out by Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987):

When women do not have access to either knowledge or power, they can only turn to the supernatural for help. Women are therefore to be found at the nearest mazar (shrine) or with a pir (holy man) in the hope of eliciting supernatural help for the birth of a son, for the fidelity of a husband, or for the physical wellbeing of all. Women have nowhere else to turn, and there is no point in turning to each other as each is as helpless as the next. (Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987, p.29)

Regardless of Shahzada's position as a Chaudharani, she finds herself helpless and devoid of any say in her daughter's fate. She laments, "I wish I was a fishmonger's wife. For then I could protect my daughter's interests. Here I am a Chaudharani, but I don't even have enough power in my little finger, to save my daughter from the fate that is awaiting her" (*The Holy Woman*, p.75). Shahzada's haplessness reflects the restrictions faced by women, where wealth and high standards of living do not necessarily afford women autonomy or decision-making power.

Shahzada not only remains 'voiceless' herself but also discourages her younger daughter from challenging her father's decision, "No, stop Ruby! I have tried to persuade him but it is no use" (*The Holy Woman*, p.83). Shahzada's subordination is so strongly internalised that she fails to see how her younger daughter could 'reason' with the man that she has failed to persuade. Ruby too remains silent as she is made aware that her voice would not be heard. One possible reason for the silence that women either choose or are forced into is discussed by Deborah Cameron (1990) who points out how social taboos and restrictions prevent women from speaking:

Even where it seems that women could speak if they chose, the conditions imposed on their lives by society may make this a difficult or dangerous choice. Silence can also mean censoring yourself for fear of being ridiculed, attacked or ignored. (Cameron, 1990, p.4)

Zari Bano is similarly forced to keep silent as the conditions imposed on her life by patriarchy make it impossible for her to speak out. After the initial debate with her father she realises her lack of power, and understands the unchallengeable authority behind her father's decision as her mother tells her younger daughter Ruby, "he has his traditions, his father and male relatives to support him" (*The Holy Woman*, p.83). Habib does not stand alone in his decision. As already mentioned, he has his clan to support him. This can

be compared to Sakhi's grief in *The Pakistani Bride* which was understood and collectively mourned by his fellow tribal men as they join to help their 'brother' in his crisis. Habib Khan's sorrow is also collectively shared as his father and brother agree with his decision and facilitate the marriage to the Quran ceremony. However, Zari Bano finds herself alone and facing the biggest challenge of her life. This collective sense of helplessness and subordination displayed by Zari Bano, her mother and Ruby indicates the authority of the male voice against which the female voice dies out. She realises that no woman around her is in a position to help her. It is this learned and understood sense of helplessness that enables Zari Bano to forgive her mother and her sister, "don't look so sad, I absolve you of any guilt. I know you can't help me. I do not hold you responsible for anything" (*The Holy Woman*, p.88). By forgiving her mother and sister, Zari Bano also further strengthens their sense of subordination and helplessness. She allows them to remain in their passive, weak and subordinated selves justifying their meekness through her understanding and acceptance.

The supreme authority of Habib, supported by his male kin, is observed by all the women of the extended family. Zari Bano's female cousin, Gulshan, also expresses her inability to help Zari Bano:

What could she do, anyway, if Zari Bano's own mother and sister had been powerless to help? She cast a surreptitious glance at her grandfather, her Uncle Habib and her father...Gulshan was a mere young woman, was just a pebble in the company of giant rocks, to be easily trodden upon and crushed if the need arose. (*The Holy Woman*, p.152)

Gulshan too speaks of the same helplessness that Zari Bano, her mother and her sister experience, an ingrained sense of inferiority cemented by the centuries of voiceless subordination that 'socialises' women to accept patriarchal authority. Ghanim (2009), whilst discussing women's compliance with oppression, questions as to why women choose to continue in the violence that victimises them and in a bid to find a possible answer, to the puzzling question he raises, he claims:

Socialisation of women tends to enforce and normalise patriarchal social construct in the lives of women. A particular social construction enters into conflict with reality and natural existence. This social construct becomes the only reality that women experience in a patriarchal system. Thus, internalisation is the process where the socially constructed appears natural to women. (Ghanim, 2009, p.12)

Shahraz's female characters exhibit what Ghanim calls to be the internalisation of male superiority - one which silences Zari Bano's mother, her sister and later her cousin. For them, to resist is futile, as their individual voices are easily crushed and dismissed as nothing more than a mere noise. As Cameron (1990) notes, "if women's utterance is not forbidden, it is often ignored; and if not ignored, then received with howls of execration. It is the fear of censure which leads to self-censorship" (Cameron, 1990, p.6). Jia (2003) in her article, 'Equating Womanhood with Victimhood: The Positionality of the Women Protagonist in the Contemporary Writings of the South Asian Women' highlights, "the complexities of the many relationships, familial and otherwise, which South Asian women [live in] and daily deal with" (Jia, 2003, p.369). She further explains the inter-dependent and inter-related nature of their actions and asserts that, "the South Asian woman seldom if ever acts in isolation. Being in a network or a mesh of relationship with others, her every action has ramifications and consequences" (Jia, 2003, p.369). This complexity of 'inter-dependent relationships' forms the core of female relationships in *The Holy Woman* as various female figures, bound in their role of wife, daughter, cousin, and sister are aware of the consequences that their actions can carry for other women in the family. Ghanim (2009) explains how family structures bind women in dependent relationships resulting in weak and fearful women, as the mothers subordinate to the male authority of their husbands and fail to offer any female model of strong, resisting and challenging character which the daughter may follow (Ghanim, 2009, p.146). He further explains:

After resigning to her fate, a woman must find explanation or justification for her miseries. Sharing a common fate with all women is the only way to ensure a woman's acceptance of her circumstances, because seriously challenging her fate is neither possible nor permitted. (Ghanim, 2009, p.148)

Shahraz's female figures see each other as sharing a common fate, a sense of connectedness through which they learn to live with their conflicting emotions.

Naomi Nkealah (2009) points out a very similar situation as she explores the predicament of Alifa Riffat's female character, Zannouba, in her novel *The Long Night of Winter*. Zannouba remains the victim of her husband's infidelity who, despite her resistance, continues to sleep with a servant girl. Suffering from injustice and rage, Zannouba confides in her mother and enquires about her father's behaviour. To her disappointment her mother, "lowers her gaze to the glass of tea in her hand and replies, all men are like that, he too was a man" (Nkealah, 2009, p.36). Nkealah describes how Zannouba's mother inculcates silence as opposed to resistance and normalises her father's infidelity as a social reality that women must live with. She explains that, "from her mother's confession, Zannouba learns that her own self-preservation lies not in trying to fight the system but in using the silence as a bulwark against any further encroachment to her somewhat stable life" (Nkealah, 2009, p.36). In other words, her mother's confession not only strengthens the perpetuation of male superiority but also normalises the unquestioned sexual freedom socially allowed to men. Therefore Zannouba snuffs out any flicker of rebellion and puts her mind at ease with her husband's mistress in the same way that Zari Bano resigns herself to her fate. At the same time both Zannouba and Zari Bano are aware of the unjust nature of their sufferings. This continuation in submission can be explained by Jia (2003):

South Asian women seem to continue being submissive, even against their interests, continuing to obey rather than defy... Their submission becomes a habit for many, a way of life, the line of least resistance, requiring little thought and little mental struggle. It is promoted as a virtue, a state of being aspired to, the mark or badge of a dutiful and desirable daughter/wife/daughter-in-law. (Jia, 2003, p.376)

Whereas Zennouba's life becomes a 'habit' and a 'line of least resistance', Zari Bano, through her submission, becomes a virtuous, dutiful and desirable daughter.

Zari Bano's Professor from her university, who is the head of a feminist organisation, travels to meet Zari Bano as she learns of her predicament. She questions and condemns

Zari Bano's agreement to become a Holy Woman as contradicting her feminist ideals/views. The situation becomes highly ironic as Zari Bano has been an active member of the feminist organisation, fighting against the oppression of women. Caught in a painful and embarrassing situation, Zari Bano offers the following explanation:

I could have refused. I could have turned to hundreds of people for help, if I had wanted to. I could have married my fiancé, if I had wanted to. But I didn't at the end, for the same reason thousands of other young women in our patriarchal society...For our izzat's [honour] sake, and our family's honour. (*The Holy Woman*, p.173)

This willingness and conscious acceptance of her father's decision by Zari Bano reflects how women are made to see themselves responsible for the family honour and readily offer themselves, their bodies, and their sexualities in sacrifice to uphold male patriarchal values. As Shahla Haeri (2002) in *No Shame for the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women* asserts, "Men have honour. Women represent honour; they symbolise honour; they are honour. Objectified into manipulative possessions, women conceptually lose a sense of individuality and autonomous identity in the eyes of community" (Haeri, 2002, p.36). Zari Bano also sees herself as her father's and family's honour and as she identifies with the persona that her father chooses for her, she realises her object status in the eyes of her father, "I have been living in a glass house of make-belief, Mother. Your Sleeping Beauty has been rudely awakened to taste the true world of patriarchal tyranny" (*The Holy Woman*, p.87). In this true world of patriarchal tyranny, Zari Bano realises that the family property and inheritance carries more value for which her future can easily be bartered. Just as Afshan in *The Pakistani Bride* is married off to Qasim as a loan payment and Zaitoon is married to Sakhi as Qasim's reunion with his tribe, similarly, Zari Bano is married to acres of land and a book to preserve her father's heritage as she expresses:

This land is now like a millstone, a hated talisman around my neck. I have gazed at the acres of our land so many times over this past week, unable to take in the fact that my freedom, identity and womanhood has been bartered for acres of soil. (*The Holy Woman*, p.172)



Zari Bano's father also highlights that his precious land could not be handed to a stranger. As Habib claims, "Now that I have no son, to whom am I going to bequeath all this land? I am not going to hand it over to some stranger who happens to marry my daughter. This is our land, accumulated and paid for by the sweat and toil of my forefathers, down the centuries by different generations" (*The Holy Woman*, p.66). Habib's land and his daughter are both his valued possessions and symbolise his honour, and therefore cannot be passed to a strange man. As Haeri (2002) explains:

In Pakistani society, the concept of honour is tied intimately in with a sense of men's 'natural' right to possess and control women. Objectifying honour in the body of a woman, *zan*, men culturally are believed to possess honour, just as they possess gold, *Zar*, and land *Zamin*, the three most sought after commodities in Pakistan and presumably at the root of all conflicts. (Haeri, 2002, p.36)

As evident *Zan* (woman), *Zar* (gold, money) and *Zamin* (land, property) are associated commodities which reflect the honour of feudal and tribal lords. This land-body association runs through the novels, in different forms. Ayah's body in *Ice Candy Man* is symbolically associated with the Indian sub-continent which was violated and broken into two pieces just as Ayah's body is raped and tortured by many men. Zaitoon, in *The Pakistani Bride*, is married into the Kohistani tribe by Qasim to establish his long lost association with his homeland. Similarly, Zari Bano's life is also associated with the acres of land her father owns. Her brother's death directly impacts on her life. As the only son of the family dies, there is a dramatic change and imbalance in the patrilineal family structure. The large amount of property left without an heir assumes a central position in Zari Bano's fate, a focal point which determines her future life. In other words, the lands become closely associated with her, as her mother while debating with her father argues, "so you are going to wed your daughter to our fields and to her faith" (*The Holy Woman*, p.67).

This land-body association finds many other expressions in fiction across cultures and is also mentioned in the Quran. Allah in the Quran says that, "your women are a tilth for you (to cultivate) so go to your tilth as ye will" (The Quran, 2:223). This particular verse in the Quran is often misunderstood as it is referred to out of context to present a Muslim

woman as her husband's property, like his field or land. However, as Asma Berlas (2002) in *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* argues that, when read in full context, this verse cautions men to not treat their wives as sexual objects when and how they please and, "if many men read this Ayat [verse] as a license to rape their wives or to abuse them, it may be because they already are abusing their wives and are seeking religious justifications for their transgressions" (Berlas, 2002, p. 162). John Richardson (2004) further explains that, "a tilth is fertile ground, or a place where something could grow, [so] the verse is taken to only refer to vaginal intercourse...and should be viewed as referring to only one of the basic aspects of marriage between men and women, rather than the relationship as a whole" (Richardson, 2004, p.17). The symbolic use of women as a 'fertile land' in the Quranic scriptures is unfortunately understood as possession, which like property or land, is considered a man's hereditary right to control.

According to Tahera Aftab (2001), "Women and land have become items of possession within Muslim societies. Both women and land can be controlled, disputed, exchanged and gifted to settle discords and to create alliances. Some even disparage them as sources of all feuds and fights" (Aftab, 2001, p.152). Noritah Omar and Yahya Al-Wadhaf (2007) describe the 'body politics' of the land-body association in the contemporary Arab novel in general and Yemeni novels in particular. They describe how Abdul Wali, a Yemeni author, in his novel *They Die Strangers* uses the metaphor of women to represent Yemeni and Ethiopian lands (Omar and Al-Wadhaf, 2007, p.4). Similarly, the wide range of partition literature captures women's bodies in close associations with the division of land. Female bodies not only metonymically presented the opposing religious identities, Muslim, Sikhs and Hindus but also stand as 'territories' won and lost by the opposing groups. In the words of Nilufer Bharucha (1998), "women have always been the ultimate territories and countries on whom men have mapped their rights of possession" (Bharucha, 1998, p.95). Similarly, Zari Bano's body becomes a possessed territory by her father who uses her for his interests.

Zari Bano has to remain non-sexual in order to become the legitimate heiress of her family property. This association of the non-sexual and desexualised woman as the

legitimate heiress of the family land seems to suggest that two sites capable of reproduction cannot co-exist. In other words, if Zari Bano decides to get married and produce children she would not be in a position to possess her father's land that is also capable of reproduction. Therefore the only possibility lies in rendering one barren, so that the possession of the other may be legitimised. This decision is not only irrational and baseless but also highlights how the patriarchal feudal customs victimise women through irrational, egoistic and impulsive decisions centred on female sexuality and the body. According to Ketu Katrak (2006), "patriarchal and political interpretations of traditional religion and ritual often control the expressions and withholding of female sexuality. Religion is used to mystify female sexuality sometimes to the advantage but more often to the detriment of women" (Katrak, 2006, p.202). In Zari Bano's case, the little advantage she gains due to the imposition of the Holy Woman status is perhaps travelling abroad for higher education and a prestigiously enhanced social status but, as Katrak points out, she is at a greater loss as she is unable to marry and bear children and is therefore considered inadequate.

As already stated, the female body and sexuality is frequently used as a commodity to barter for the family's interest. Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* opens with a barter exchange made between two tribal men where Afshan was 'given' in marriage to Qasim's father as Afshan's father couldn't pay off his debt to Qasim's father. Similar examples abound where young girls in their early teens or even less are given in marriage to much older, even elderly, men mostly as compensation or debt payments. Either through forced marriage, ill matched marriage, sold in marriage or as in the case of Shahraz's Zari Bano's marriage to the Holy Quran the female body and sexuality is controlled by men. Zari Bano fails to challenge this male control despite being an active member of a feminist group at her university. This questions the use and role of women-based organisations in Pakistan and women such as Zari Bano who fail to 'voice out' and resist despite holding feministic views. Perhaps the centuries of psychological and emotional subordination and sense of inferiority ingrained in women cannot be easily overcome, even by educated women such as Zari Bano, as she expresses:

I woke up one morning to find out that books, feminism, campaigns and education are all utterly useless against the patriarchal tyranny of our feudal landlords. Stupidly I had convinced myself that as an educated, urban, upper-class woman, I was different to those 'poor' women, lower down the strata of our society. (*The Holy Woman*, p.171)

Zari Bano's realisation exposes the vulnerability of women across the different classes in a patriarchal society. It also exposes the patriarchal grip on female bodies through a process of mental and emotional control. Katrak (2006) calls this:

A politics of the body [which] involves layers and levels of ideological influences, sociocultural and religious, that impose knowledge or ignorance of female bodies and construct woman as subject or object. Socialisation patterns combine to have a hold on women even after education, migration, re-location out of the original family and coded structures of morality and behaviour. (Katrak, 2006, p.9-10)

This indicates that education alone is at times insufficient to challenge these patriarchal structures. In fact, coming to realise one's oppression proves to be a more painful situation than being ignorant of it. A similar thought is expressed by her mother who also realises that her husband's strong financial and social status does not empower her in any way. Instead, she is defined by her position as a 'wife' which requires subservience and subordination as it also does for Zari Bano as a daughter. Both Zari Bano and her mother are constrained within their roles whereas Habib seems free of any restrictions. Shahzada's initial effort to challenge her husband is met with utter rage and fury by both her husband and father-in-law. In other words, women in Pakistan, if they make an attempt to take a few steps forward<sup>15</sup>, to assert any form of agency, they are often sent reeling several steps back. This backlash that impedes the progress of Pakistani women is captured by Shaheed and Mumtaz through their book *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back*. For example, Zari Bano's mother sends Zari Bano to her suitor's home in Karachi for a short visit. Her action is condemned by her husband and her father-in-law, Siraj Din who sees her action as her attempt to challenge the conventional structures of marriage arrangements, "Are you telling me, Shahzada, that my young, unmarried granddaughter has gone to stay, all alone, in a strange family's home and is in the company of a single young man?" (*The Holy Woman*, p.35). Siraj Din not only

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<sup>15</sup> Inspired from Mumtaz, K. and Shaheed, F. (1987) book titled *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back*.

reprimands his daughter-in-law but reminds her of their feudal rules and customs and makes clear how valuable they are for their clan:

Alongside our land, our wives and daughters, our izzat - our honour - is the most precious thing in our lives. We never ever compromise on the issue of our women and our izzat! No matter what age we live in; no matter what the world outside dictates; no matter what evil lies outside our door... we will never let you sully our izzat or our women's honour, Shahzada. (*The Holy Woman*, p.37)

Siraj Din clearly points out the feudal code of conduct which holds 'women' synonymous with 'land' which in turn is associated with their family honour. Therefore, Shahzada's bold attempt to send Zari Bano to her suitor's home is not only met with severe rebuking but it later on proves to be the basis of Habib's dislike towards Sikandar. Shahzada is also, like her daughter Zari Bano, awakened to taste the bitter reality that her social patriarchal structures bind women at all stages in their lives, whether single or married. It is the men that hold the ultimate power of steering their women's fate. As soon as Shahzada shows any form of agency she ceases to be the favourite daughter-in-law. Emotionally black-mailed Shahzada further receives a divorce threat from Habib as she tries to intervene in his decision of Zari Bano's marriage with the Quran. Akbar Syed (2011) in his chapter entitled 'Circulation of Zari Bano from one Man to Another' comments on Zari Bano's position:

Zari Bano is a commodity, a raw material, a social value in her father's possession to be used as willed. Her body, materially and physically with the social values and exchanged values ascribed to it, inaugurates the symbolic order. The practical realisation of this metaphysical is through the appropriation of woman's body by her father as in patriarchy. She must submit herself to his power that he has constructed through patriarchal capitalism and its socio-economic signification. (Syed, 2011, p.286)

Analysing Zari Bano's relationship with her father specifically, Syed describes her commoditised status as serving the needs of men associated to her in the light of Marxist/socialist feminist theoretical concepts. He argues that, "the four structures of capitalist patriarchy identified by Marxist/socialist feminist are reproduction, production,

the socialisation of children and sexuality as being interdependent. Women's liberation can only be achieved by challenging their capitalist patriarchal ideology" (Syed, 2011, p.283). He also argues that the works of Luce Irigaray give shape to the Marxist feminist perspectives in literature:

Luce Irigaray tells us how the society as we know it and prevailing culture is based upon the exchange of women. The entry into the 'social order' or the 'symbolic order', is only possible by the fact that men or group of men circulate women among themselves as in matrimony, and thus make women bodies - through their use, consumption and circulation into an unknown infrastructure which makes social life and culture possible. The use and traffic of women is seen to be subtended and unfold the reign of patriarchy and the economy. (Syed, 2011, p.284)

Zari Bano's status for her father is that of a 'valuable commodity' which he refuses to, "hand it over to any stranger who happens to marry his daughter" (*The Holy Woman*, p.66). He clearly understands her marriage with Sikandar as a 'circulation of his land' which he could not bear. Zari Bano too realises the harsh reality that her father may be liberal enough to allow her to gain education and enjoy all the comforts of life however when it comes to his male ego and tribal customs he does not hesitate to sacrifice his own daughter's happiness. Zari Bano herself explains that, "my father made me believe that he would 'sell the world for me' when in fact he eventually decided to 'sell' me to his male whims and ancient traditions" (*The Holy Woman*, p.87).

This attitude also appears in *The Pakistani Bride* where Qasim adopts a strange girl (Zaitoon) as his daughter and provides her with love and care but he does not hesitate to use her as a means to re-establish his ties with his tribal people by marrying her to his tribal nephew. Though Miriam tries to dissuade him, Qasim keeps firm. He claims that he has made a vow and 'given his word' which could not be broken. In other words his promise was more important than his adopted daughter's life even though Qasim was aware of the difficulties Zaitoon would face. Ironically, both Qasim in *The Pakistani Bride* and Habib in *The Holy Woman* at one point question their own decisions, "Qasim had an unreasoning impulse to take her (Zaitoon) back with him... he should have listened to the child's violent pleas... he felt he had acted in undue haste. Too late he tried to fight this

wave of sentimentality and fear” (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.166). Habib also, as he sees Zari Bano dressed in her burkha, feels uncomfortable with what he had done to his daughter. Interestingly, both Qasim and Habib understand the cruelty of their decision but act according to their customs.

Raised in liberal, yet modest settings of a Muslim family, Zari Bano is unable to confess her love for Sikandar before her father. As she desperately tries to debate with her father, claiming she wants a normal life, Habib Khan accuses her of ‘wanting a man’, “so you are saying that you want a man in your life?” (*The Holy Woman*, p.85). Habib’s direct reference to his daughter’s intimate desires and sexuality leave Zari Bano ashamed and confused, “Her cheeks crimson with shame and shock, Zari Bano stared mutely at her father. Then her gaze fell as embarrassment and a torrent of boiling rage assaulted her body...the sexual connotations to his words had shaken her to the core” (*The Holy Woman*, p.85). By denying his daughter her right to marriage, Habib ‘de-sexualises’ her. Zari Bano also has to observe purdah as a part of her new identity. If we take purdah as a symbolic ‘de-sexualisation’, then Zari Bano undergoes double ‘de-sexualisation’. In other words, she is twice removed from her identity. As she steps into her new identity, her new role, Zari Bano goes through an emotional and physical transformation:

I have been stripped of my identity and a stranger is taking my place. I am, at this moment in time, wrestling with the death and mourning of one woman, while preparing in fear for the birth and rise of another. I don’t want Zari Bano to die! But I cannot keep her alive. (*The Holy Woman*, p.146)

In order to symbolically kill ‘Zari Bano’ and give ‘birth’ to a Holy Woman, Zari Bano performs/undergoes a physical transformation. She begins by cutting her hair and then removes all pieces of jewellery and wipes her face clean of all traces of makeup and then finally dresses into her burkha which encloses her body in a shapeless garb. Zari Bano is not only de-sexualised by her father, as she cannot marry and have children, she further ‘de-sexualises’ herself by replacing her fine clothes with the modest covering of a burkha.

Though physically, mentally and emotionally transformed into the role of a holy woman, Zari Bano nevertheless desires to have children and later we discover her desire for a male child. Shahraz highlights the hidden desires of the women living under patriarchy for whom the sense of identity for a woman only exists in association with a man, father, brother, husband and later sons. Radah Hedge (1999) in her article 'Sons and M(others): Framing the Maternal Body and the Politics of Reproduction in South Indian Context' examines the narratives of three women belonging to a rural area in South India where women use their bodies in an endless struggle to give birth to a male child, even at the cost of female infanticide. She explains how one woman, Kumari, killed several of her female babies. She saw herself as a 'liberator' for the female babies as according to her, her daughters would live a miserable life without a brother to protect them and no dowry to buy them security in their in-laws house. Radah brings out the bitter and painful reality of how women are socially conditioned into fear, self-negation and degradation in patriarchal societies. Another underlying message revolves around the objectification of the female maternal body, instrumentalised by the patriarchal male to produce his sons and the social acceptance of this practice which exerts (social) pressure on women, conditioning them to conform and to think that this is normal. Hedge<sup>16</sup> asserts:

And so, in order to maintain their status and maintain their maternal duty, women work their bodies for the birth of the male child. The thought engages them continually - in their conversations, their banter, their insults and in short their whole existence. (Hedge, 1999, p.29)

This is also evident in Sidhwa's Zaitoon, as she has to conceive to be able to travel to the plains to see her father. Similarly, Shahraz's Zari Bano desires motherhood;

Her hands held against her stomach muscles she doubled over in pain, a cry of anguish mingling with the sound of the water spray. How would she ever be able to quell the ache of an empty, forgotten womb, the

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<sup>16</sup> A recent incident in Pakistan took place where women abused and pressurised by their in-law families to bear son (s) were (in most cases) sent or willingly chose to pursue a peer (religiously devoted man) who claimed that he possessed the divine power to bless them with a son. This fake peer had sexual intercourse with 300 women claiming that he has a spiritual soul inside his body that would bless the women with sons. He further blackmailed some of the women by filming them but he was later arrested by the police. However, it clearly highlights the extent to which women living under patriarchal male centred societies some times are forced to go in the desire to produce a male child. For more information visit <http://im-pakistan.blogspot.com/2011/08/front-line-express-news-10-august-2011.html> (Front Line with Kamran Shahid Express News 10<sup>th</sup> August 2011)



longing to cradle a child against her breast. 'I want children too, like other woman Allah Pak!' She beseeched. (*The Holy Woman*, p.163)

Zari Bano's desire to be able to achieve 'motherhood' reflects the embedded notion of her womb and body as 'sites' of reproduction preferably for male children, as towards the end of the novel the protagonist expresses the desire for a male child. Further, the overall structure of the novel is male centred; as the novel begins with the death of a male child, it ends with the birth of a male child, Harris, Ruby's son and the desire of another male child, Zari Bano's son. This echoes what Cornell (1995) describes, "her womb and body are no longer hers to imagine. They have been turned over to the imagination of others, and those imaginations are then allowed to rein over her body as law" (Cornell, 1995, p.47). Zari Bano's mother mourns the death of her son, Jafar, while Zari Bano moans for a son she can never 'have'. One way or the other, the focus is towards male desire, whether to 'desire the male' or do what the 'male desires'. Either way female desire is repressed and overlooked. Similarly, Zari Bano becomes a Holy Woman, not because she desired it, but due to her father's desire. Later, Zari Bano's younger sister is married off to Sikandar because Habib again desired it. Towards the end of the novel, when Habib and Ruby are tragically killed it is again 'desired' that Zari Bano should leave her role as a Holy Woman and marry Sikandar, to which Zari Bano later agrees. The point to be noted is that Zari Bano's marriage with Sikandar takes place in order to provide Harris, Ruby and Sikandar's son, with a mother figure not simply because Zari Bano desired to marry Sikandar.

Mohanalaksmi Rajakumar (2005) in her article 'Dismantling Patriarchal Marriages in *The Quilt and Other Stories*' explains how, "The male characters in Chughtai's stories<sup>17</sup> procure female resources with no consequences or restitution. In each of the stories a man takes something of significant value from a woman, usually her body or her labour, leaving her depleted, while augmenting himself from her resources" (Rajakumar, 2005, p.166). In her

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<sup>17</sup> This article by Mohanalaksmi Rajakumar (2005) analyses Ismat Chughtai's short stories titled 'Scent of the Body', 'The Rock', and 'The Eternal Vine'. Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991) stands as one of the most widely read and popular figures in Urdu fiction. A feminist writer, Chughtai, is mostly known for her controversial short story 'Lihaf' which explores the theme of a sexually frustrated housewife ignored by her husband who seeks sexual fulfilment with her female servant in her house. However, Ismat's genius as a writer was not by any means limited to 'lesbianism'. She was the first woman to engage in feminist writings when women were highly discouraged from involving in intellectual activities. She wrote about the issues of women especially in marriage and in close family relations.

short story 'The Rock', Chughtai describes the conscious 'de-shaping' of the wives' bodies by the husband, as he desires to domesticate and mould his wives into house-makers bearing children. In Rajakumar's words, "her body becomes the projection of his wishes not merely in the sexual domination but also in shape and substance" (Rajakumar, 2005, p.171). Just as Zari Bano's body becomes the projection of her father's desires. Shahraz's female figures silently observe the manipulative patriarchal structures working to confine women within male defined rules without any direct or effective form of challenge, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of male violence against the female body. Referring again to Rajakumar's analysis of Chughtai's 'The Rock' we see how both men and women promote the objectification of the female body through the notion of 'female-as-body'. The male character of 'The Rock' is a slim attractive man who moves from one wife to the other as his wives, through child bearing, lose their body shapes and 'disfigure' themselves. However, ironically the new wife that he takes experiences physical repulsion at the sight of his previous wife's body, unaware that she would eventually suffer a similar fate. According to Rajakumar (2005):

The gazing at the wife's body by another woman, not a man, epitomises the prevalence of dismissing women's bodies as appearance-based commodities. Here Chughtai shows the rift created between women when women themselves judge one another's life/body without seeing the manipulation of the man behind both. (Rajakumar, 2005, p.172)

Chughtai therefore presents female figures unable to communicate bodily in a collective sense of understanding of the destructive patriarchal influences on the female body. In a concluding statement Rajakumar asserts, "In 'Scent of the Body', 'The Rock' and 'The Eternal Vine' Chughtai shows that woman's bodies are the locus through which men exert their power. In each of these stories women conform to masculine practices and are used directly against other women (Rajakumar, 2005, p.172). Similarly, Habib Khan exerts his power through controlling Zari Bano's body and sexuality. As Shahzada is forced to comply with her husband she, in a way, works against Zari Bano. Female solidarity then becomes a betrayal which is painfully accepted as helplessness. Consequently, Zari Bano feels alienated as her mother and sister emotionally distance themselves from her, "Ruby wept bitterly. For the rest of the day she kept well away from her sister unable to bear

the sight of the hideous black garment draping that shapely body... she maintained her distance from her for the next few days (*The Holy Woman*, p.166). Zari Bano's seclusion brings her isolation from everything associated with her previous life, including her relationship with her immediate family. She becomes estranged from her family, especially her sister:

By the third week a chasm had naturally opened between the two sisters, and both were experiencing a reluctance to have a heart-to-heart talk. Zari Bano was succeeding in deliberately suppressing memories relating to her past... By the time a month had elapsed, Ruby sadly accepted that she had lost her sister to her fate. (*The Holy Woman*, p.167)

Thus, male victimisation of women can, at times, build solidarity amongst women who empathise and support each other as well as perpetuate helplessness and isolation as in Zari Bano's case.

The novel ends with Zari Bano's marriage to Sikandar in hopes of a happy future. However, one wonders of the little conscious effort made by, or allowed to be made by, Zari Bano in the face of male pressure and dominance. Secondly, it also raises the issue of whether Zari Bano achieved what 'she desired' or was she merely persuaded to accept what benefitted her family. In the beginning of the novel she refuses to marry Sikandar to save her father's family tradition and towards the end of the novel she marries Sikandar to again save his family and support his orphaned son. In other words, Zari Bano is emotionally pressurised by men on both occasions, by her father to refuse marriage and by Sikandar to accept marriage. As Sikandar appeals to Zari Bano, "let the passionate woman come to life again" (*The Holy Woman*, p.488). The word 'let' reflects irony as it puts the female figure in the position of 'doing an act'. But it is evident that her every action is enforced through male desire to serve male interests. It can be said that Zari Bano remains under the influence of people around her, especially her father. She fails to make any decisions regarding her own life; rather she remains a product of her circumstances. She could have refused to marry Sikandar but she easily succumbs to pleas and social pressure. She accommodates her life, her role, identity and desire as she yields to comply and co-operate with others.

Similarly, Zari Bano begins to observe purdah not due to her desire but as a requirement for her new identity. Sidhwa presents purdah and veiling through segregated spaces and dress codes that are practiced and reflected through the living styles of her characters. Shahraz introduces purdah and veiling as a concept that needs to be adopted and taken up especially by young educated women who have the liberty to step into the public arena and pursue careers. Whereas Zaitoon is taught to observe purdah as a daily part of her dress code, for Shahraz's Zari Bano, veiling comes as a part of her new identity. Zari Bano feels covering herself in a black burkha as an imposition, "Can any woman look lovely in this garment? I loathe this clothe, sister Sakina. It burns my body" (*The Holy Woman*, p.144). Zari Bano struggles to combine her two opposing images, one as a woman who barely covered her head and the other as covered from head to toe. Zari Bano's transformation which begins as a shock and loathing for the black burkha that she would have to wear, gradually became her comfort zone and like a second skin to her. Her role of Holy Woman or *Shahzadi Ibadat* (princess of worship) ends as a temporary phase, leaving behind the veil as a permanent impression on Zari Bano's body and soul. The glamour of fine clothes and fashion that Zari Bano once longed for loses its charm and value for her as she emerges as a woman with presumably free will to decide in her choice of whether to veil or not. In her discussion with her mother, she explains how discarding the veil after her marriage with Sikandar is similar to the sort of challenge and horror that she had experienced when she was forced to wear it:

Until now, I have gone everywhere with my burka; now I am requested to discard it at home. I am so used to the burka, feel so totally happy and safe behind it, Mother, that without it I feel naked and disoriented, very conscious of my body and its shape. (*The Holy Woman*, p.443)

Zari Bano adheres to her veiling even in her husband's house. Confined within the boundaries of her black burkha, Zari Bano actually roams around freely unbothered by domestic confines and homely duties. After becoming a holy woman Zari Bano travels abroad for higher education in Islamic studies. She travels to Egypt and makes a short visit to the UK as a part of her preaching duties. So purdah, in the words of Shirin Zubair Haider and Sana Imtiaz (2011), becomes "a strategy for her emancipation. Hijab acquires

new meanings as a domain-marker; the veil was intended to assert the spatial boundary but ironically it becomes the protagonist's resource for transcendence of the spatial boundary" (Haider and Imtiaz, 2011, p.12). What remains striking is that Zari Bano adheres to her black burka as it has become her habit more than understanding its practical purpose. Observing purdah does allow Zari Bano a certain freedom of movement, however, her travel abroad is entirely due to her father's strong financial position. In addition to this, regardless of observing purdah, Zari Bano remains the centre of male gaze which clearly indicates how purdah is used as a patriarchal tool to yet again control the female body.

In one incident Zari Bano is asked to dance at her sister's wedding as her female cousin and her sister insist, "come on, forget your holy self for once. Give us back the old Zari Bano just for one evening" (*The Holy Woman*, p.248). As Zari Bano removes her veil she reverts into her old self:

The Shahzadi Ibadat was soon forgotten as her body remembered how to weave magic in movement and rhythm. The rhythmic clapping spurred her on. She responded to the tune, smiling and dimpling down at the women. Rising and dipping with ever more elegant movements of her body, finally reaching a crescendo to the sad music. (*The Holy Woman*, p.248)

Zari Bano dances in the private sphere of women, a segregated space that allows her the freedom to abandon her veil. Ironically Zari Bano is unaware that Sikandar is also in the room, hidden in the dim light 'watching' her from a far corner. Sikandar's secret gaze symbolically presents the male gaze that constantly guards and follows women in patriarchal societies. Zari Bano often becomes the centre of male gaze throughout the novel. In the very opening scene of the novel Zari Bano is 'watched' by Sikandar as she stands under a tree watching a monkey dance at a village-fair. In another situation Sikandar finds Zari Bano sitting in her garden, lost in thoughts as he silently 'observes' her. Shahrzad repeatedly presents Zari Bano in situations where she is caught by the male gaze. As Zari Bano realises Sikandar 'watching' her from the far dark end of the room, a sense of fear and guilt and shame overtakes her. Sikandar's presence reflects the ever

present male gaze; the never ending scrutiny of the female figure to which she sometimes may seem oblivious, but it is always there following her around the house, in her father's house, husband's house, in the street, in the fields, out in the open as well as within the four walls. A similar sense of confusion is raised in the words of a young tribal girl who is made to labour in the fields yet closely watched and blamed for any male gaze that falls her way:

What is there to my body?  
Is it studded with diamonds or pearls?  
My brother's eyes forever follow me.  
My father's gaze guards me all the time, stern, angry.  
Then why do they make me labour in the fields...  
Not knowing who may cast a look upon us.  
We stand accused, condemned to be declared Kari<sup>18</sup> and murdered.

(Quoted in Dawood, 1999)

The female body is not only subjected to the scrutiny of the male gaze as an object of desire for sexual fulfilment but also closely examined as an honour carrying symbol. This kind of scrutiny is described by Sidhwa in *The Pakistani Bride* where Zaitoon is secretly watched not only by her husband but his older brother too, even when Zaitoon wanders into the mountains for fire wood or water from the river. The constant male scrutiny also reflects perhaps the masculine omnipresence not only in the physical sense but the ingrained, mental and psychological presence of the male figure, in the lives of women, which makes it almost impossible for the female to have a 'space of her own'. Even the confines of her room, the four walls are porous enough to allow the male (gaze) an entry to her. Sikandar's perusal of Zari Bano also reflects Ice Candy Man's perusal of Ayah. Whereas Ayah's unveiled body becomes the source of fascination for her Muslim admirer, it is Zari Bano's veiled body which too remains a constant source of attraction for Sikandar. Sikandar, in spite of being married to her sister Ruby, fails to overcome Zari Bano's mesmerizing beauty. Even Ibrahim Musa, the son of the family she is staying with in Egypt, after a glimpse of Zari Bano's unveiled body is haunted by her beauty and

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<sup>18</sup> Kari is the term used for a woman in Pakistan who is found guilty (but mostly accused) of illicit relationship and therefore subjected to honor killing. The male involved with the Kari woman is termed as karo.

proposes to her. As she sits unveiled, assured by the privacy of the room, Ibrahim Musa makes an unexpected entry:

The short sleeves of her dress revealed her arms above her elbows. Her throat and the rest of her feminine beauty was apparent to his gaze in all its glory... His eyes focused on her slim back and shoulder-blades highlighted by the cut of her dress... She felt naked under his gaze. Her back throbbed, imagining his male eyes roaming on it... Now having seen her without the veil, his eyes had sinfully learnt to appreciate what lay behind the black garment. (*The Holy Woman*, p.204)

This scene, in a way, indicates the practicality of purdah which saves a veiled Muslim woman from lustful male gaze. But it also reflects how purdah creates a highly charged sexual environment in cases such as those described above. Shahraz tries to convey the role of purdah for Muslim women but ironically Zari Bano constantly remains the centre of male gaze which in itself contradicts the purpose of purdah.

Shahraz aims to combine the two personas of Zari Bano to achieve an ideal Muslim woman who not only leads a happy married life and has children but who also actively participates in religious teachings. In addition, Shahraz depicts her as a successful professional woman, as Zari Bano plans to set up her own publishing company. Shahraz achieves this reunion of Zari Bano's two different personas that form a balanced Zari Bano, an epitome of beauty and brains, aware of religious boundaries and equipped with worldly knowledge. The ideal Muslim Woman who complies with her father's desire and submissively bows to his command only to be saved later by the cosmic intervention, and a turn of fate, which enable her to marry Sikandar. Shahraz, in a way, fails to offer any practical solutions for women forced to live in patriarchal societies which objectify women in the name of religion and culture. One wonders about the possible future of Zari Bano if her sister and her father had not been tragically killed. Furthermore, it is unclear what causes Habib to take his decision back and allow Zari Bano to marry.

This quite obvious flaw in Shahraz's plot, however, points to another ingrained and 'internalised' view held by Muslim women, the working of 'fate' (kismet). In other words, believing that any just or unjust action one experiences is due to the intervention of fate

or kismet. When women fail to reason or rationalise their oppressed states they naively place the burden of their sufferings on the workings of fate. In contrast, men are encouraged to mould the circumstances in their favour while women are forced to passively accept and be content. Even the authoritative figure of Godmother in *Ice Candy Man* suggests to Ayah that she should forget her past including the horrendous treatment Ice Candy Man subjected her to, “that was fated daughter, it cannot be undone, but it can be forgiven” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.262). Whereas Ayah refuses to accept her sufferings as part of fate and leaves her husband, Shahraz’s Shahzada associates all her predicaments as her fate and perhaps as the punishment for her unknown sins. She becomes ever more consistent in her praying oblivious to the patriarchal manipulation behind her sufferings or the need to challenge or resist.

Saiqa Asif and Sana Imtiaz (2011) in their article ‘Beyond the Veil: Reconceptualising the Representations of Bengali Women in Ali’s Brick Lane’ bring out the strategies of resistance adopted by the Bengali women in the face of the patriarchal oppression. They stress how:

Patriarchal oppression is propagated and supported by making it a myth, an undeniable fate. Fate is presented as an undeniable calamity for women, a form of oppression imposed by the male counterparts; the women who react against the patriarchy are hence seen as reacting against God and the state. (Asif and Imtiaz, 2011, p.1347)

Consequently, the protagonist in *Brick Lane*, Hasina, believes that, “God is putting her in tests and trials, hence he is responsible for the various forms of oppression, so fate seems to be a puritanical form of correction, a series of tests by God himself. They must not be resisted” (Asif and Imtiaz, 2011, p.1347). Shahzada too leads her life under the impression that all the blessings in her life are due to her good deeds and all the calamities that befall her family are a form of punishment for her sins. She sees the tragic deaths of her family members, her son earlier in the novel and her husband and daughters’ later in the novel, as a punishment from God. She addresses the women gathered at the mourning as she wails and laments:



Tell me, my sisters in mourning, what crime have I committed? Am I such a sinner that Allah pak had to punish me like this? I have lost all my family, my beloved Jaffar, my gentle sweet Ruby and my noble husband. I must have done something bad to be punished like this. (*The Holy Woman*, p.315)

She considers herself a bad wife and scolds herself for ever arguing with Habib. The little resistance or confrontation that she has shown towards her husband, regarding Zari Bano's decision, is severely repented and regretted by Shahzada. She performs according to the gender role expected of her as a devoted wife. The presence of a large number of women, who focus on Shahzada, as she enters the room allocated to women mourners, conjures the image of a theatrical performance, "Shahzada moved forward into the middle of the room. The village women looked up expectedly, wondering what Shahzada was going to do. Shahzada suddenly burst out with a chant of her own. There was no need to devise it. It simply erupted from her trembling lips and heart" (*The Holy Woman*, p.315). Shahzada's vehement cries in one way reflect her sorrow and grief but it also reinstates her role as a dutiful wife in the eyes of other women as Fatima, Shahzada's house cook and friend, quickly consoles her, "you have been a wonderful wife and mother Chaudharani Shahzada" (*The Holy Woman*, p.316). Thus Shahzada's behaviour reflects Judith Butler's concept of the performativity of gender roles as a result of social expectations.

This does not mean that Shahzada is aware of and is consciously performing before the village women; in fact it is evident that her chant simply erupted from her heart and lips. This shows the cultural implantation, cemented through social expectations and social approval, which creates and endows a sense of reality and truth to Shahzada's behaviour. In fact Zari Bano who claims that she cannot be the one to cause a disruption in the family tradition by refusing the role of a Holy Woman again shows that she is unable to envision herself performing outside of the socially expected gender role of a dutiful daughter. It is this fear of the unknown social reaction and hostility that Zari Bano is unable to break away from. It is this very fear that forces Shahzada to comply with her husband.

The analysis shows how the female body is sacrificed in the name of honour and women are conditioned to believe that they symbolise male honour. Whereas Habib Khan retains his honour by enforcing a traditional custom, Shahzada complies to fulfil her duty as an honourable wife, and Zari Bano refuses to rebel, when Sikandar offers to marry her without her father's permission, rather she chooses to perform her honourable role of a daughter. The point to be noted is that it is women only who suffer most by adhering to male constructed modes of being and behaving within these prescribed codes of honour. As Ketu Katrak (2006) rightly notes:

Tradition is gendered so that the same elements of tradition, such as religious belief, education, dress codes, freedom of movement are enforced very differently on male versus females [and] a struggle over what is tradition is a battle over the female body - how to control it and keep it familiar within recognisable and legitimised patriarchal codes. (Katrak, 2006, p.159)

As this chapter demonstrates, it can be argued, along the lines that Katrak has suggested, that honour is also gendered as is shame, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Men, by birth, possess honour whereas women represent family honour and therefore cannot possess it. In fact their every action, from speech to dress code and day to day activities, reflect and represent the honour of the men who own her. Similarly, men seem to be free of purdah whereas women are embodied as purdah, hidden, kept secret and therefore they are devoid of constructing any meanings of purdah. There is a dire need for Muslim women to assert their individuality and, "lay claim to honour not as something accorded them as female related to and dependent on male kin, but as something basic to their humanity as a sense of self" (Haeri, 2002, p.40). This will facilitate women to break out of the bodily associations that patriarchy constructs to justify subordination of women.

## Chapter no. 4

### Shame, Female Body and the Patriarch in Qaisra Shahraz's Typhoon

*I am disgraced in the prison of my body, you are in my capture  
Bearing on your body the scars of a painless imprisonment*

(Anantharam, 2009, p.215)

Qaisra Shahraz's *Typhoon* (2003) highlights how social attitudes towards female sexuality are shame driven which, in turn, have deep influences on the relationship women have with their bodies and how they are perceived by the society. Shame, like purdah, is socially channelled to assert patriarchal control over female sexuality through the female body. The present chapter aims to highlight a female bodily association with shame which is effectively bolstered by men to control women. Two main female figures, Naghmana and Kaneez, show different bodily responses to shame. Whereas Kaneez succeeds in overcoming her shame, Naghmana's shame proves more self-destructive as she commits suicide. Shame is presented as a powerful emotion which has the capacity to restrict women in a variety of ways.

*Typhoon* is Shahraz's second novel, a sequel to *The Holy Woman*. In addition to new characters, such as Naghmana, Gulshan and Haroon, who inhabit the main plot of the novel, characters from *The Holy Woman* are also discussed in the sub-plots of the novel. Shahraz achieves this combination by temporally and spatially dividing the novel into four parts. The first part of the novel opens in the present time where Gulshan, a middle aged woman, travels to Chiragpur, a village on the outskirts of Karachi. As she reflects on her life twenty years ago, when she used to live in Chiragpur, with her young son and husband Haroon, the readers are transported twenty years back in time. The next two parts make up the main plot of the novel as the narrative reaches its climax with Naghmana and Haroon's alleged adultery. The final part of the novel brings us back to the present context. The title of the novel *Typhoon* translates into an Urdu word meaning 'storm' or a 'whirl wind'. The title remains symbolic as the characters in the novel experience an upheaval in their lives, caught in a turbulent flow of events. This

typhoon in the lives of the village people is caused by the arrival of a young, modern city woman, Naghmana into the village of Chiragpur. Visiting her aunt Fatima in the village, Naghmana discovers that Haroon, her previous class fellow at University whom she secretly married but separated from soon after, lives in the same village. When Gulshan, Haroon's cousin and wife (mother of his son, Moeen), and her mother Hajra discover Haroon secretly meeting Fatima's niece from the city, their lives are shattered by the events that follow. As Haroon leaves his wife's bed in the middle of the night to meet Naghmana near the village well, Gulshan and later her mother secretly follow him. The matter is referred to the village elder Siraj Din who decides to call a Kacheri<sup>19</sup>. Haroon reveals in the Kacheri that Naghmana is his previous wife. The plot reaches its climax as Naghmana is pressurised into asking for a divorce. She leaves the village shortly after the kacheri. Siraj Din and the kacheri participants soon realise that they have acted in haste and also suffer in shame.

Shame permeates the entire structure of the novel. Shame, like honour, is closely associated with the female body in Pakistani society. It will not be wrong to say that shame is a condition that women in Pakistani society are born with. In other words, the birth of a female child in itself is a matter of shame unlike a male child which is a matter of honour. This is clearly reflected through the body language of many fathers who respond with silent shame on the birth of a female child, especially if it is a second or a third daughter and, in contrast, with evident pleasure on the birth of a son. The female figure, as well as inheriting a sense of shame by birth, is also given the added responsibility of preserving the honour of her male kin. As discussed in the previous chapter, women are considered not to possess honour but to symbolise her father, brother, and uncles' honour. This chapter will demonstrate that shame is also associated with female sexuality and the female body and her every action is measured against a scale of honour devised by the men of her family. Women have to earn their share of honour in society through conditions such as preservation of sexuality, enduring a

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<sup>19</sup> Kacheri is a term used for an open court usually headed by a village elder, preferably an old man considered wise and respected amongst the people. Kacheri is usually a village custom where people refer their disputes to a village elder, head of the kacheri. He summons a kacheri and in the presence of the victim and the perpetrator/accused the village elder listens to the matter and settles the dispute with punishment given to the guilty. A large number of audiences usually attend the kacheri and the decision taken by the village head is respected and mutually accepted.

marriage (even a violent marriage) and bearing sons. Men, on the other hand, do not seem to require any specific ‘achievements’ to claim honour. Furthermore, shame is made synonymous with the female body by associating it with female sexuality. Consequently, the female body becomes the primary site of male control and surveillance and shame becomes a disciplinary tool. Saiqa Imtiaz Asif and Sana Imtiaz (2011) in their article ‘Beyond the Veil: Re-conceptualizing the Representations of Bengali Women in Ali’s Brick Lane’ argue that the, “social construct of shame results in making the body of a woman - a battle ground; in this battle the honour of the clan and the family has to be supreme. Shame is regarded as a very important social construct which results in restricting the physical mobility of women, making their rebellion against patriarchy a taboo” (Asif and Imtiaz, 2011, p.1348).

My analysis exposes how notions of shame shroud the lives of various female characters. *Typhoon* presents an interesting interplay of the different forms in which shame permeates the structure of the novel, and explores how it dwells in the hearts of women slowly poisoning their souls and dominating their thoughts. Different female characters in *Typhoon* experience shame in one form or the other. Naghmana is ashamed of being caught with Haroon and is further publicly shamed and called a whore. Gulshan also feels ashamed as her husband, Haroon, leaves her bed to meet another woman at night. Her shame springs from her sense of inferiority. Further, Kaneez the village Chaudharani<sup>20</sup> suffers in shame as her husband considers her a second choice (he wanted to marry another village girl, Fatima). Yet another sense of shame torments her as her husband learns of her rape (she was raped in her early teens) and rejects her. Though he dies soon after his marriage with Kaneez, the little time he spends with her constantly reminds Kaneez of her shamed body. We also come across some minor characters, like the thirty seven year old Jamila, who is ashamed of her unwanted pregnancy. Naimat Bibi and Kalsoom, the village cook and the match maker respectively, suffer in shame and guilt for spreading the news of Naghmana’s adultery. As the plot dynamically shifts between past and present we see how shame manages to transfer across time and space growing within characters. As Naghmana is summoned back to the village, in the last part of the

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<sup>20</sup> Chaudharani is a term given to the wife of a Chaudhary which means a landlord, a wealthy person in the village who owns a certain amount of land. Chaudhary is also a caste and the people belonging to this caste are mostly found in the Punjab province but generally live across Pakistan.

novel, she returns as a liberator who frees the people of the village from the clutches of shame by forgiving them. However, her return proves fatal as Naghmana's inner turmoil drives her to commit suicide.

As Haroon and Naghmana's secret meeting becomes public they make several attempts to explain the situation, however, their pleas fall on deaf ears. Outraged and angered, Hajra, Gulshan's mother, is bent on punishing Haroon for betraying her daughter. She confronts him in anger, "you have half killed my daughter you bastard! What does my Gulshan lack that you found in that whore's arms?" Hajra snarled. "What does this slut have that my daughter doesn't? Gulshan is intact in all parts, isn't she?" (*Typhoon*, p.48). As evident, Naghmana and Gulshan's bodies are brought into question. Gulshan's body is debated in terms of lacking, insufficient and unable to satisfy her husband's sexual desires, whereas Naghmana bears the blame of alluring and misleading Haroon. So whereas Naghmana's body becomes a source of guilt and shame for her, Gulshan begins to pity her worthless body which too is a matter of shame, as she exclaims:

Aren't I beautiful enough for him? Is that urban woman with her short sleeved dress and her loose hair more attractive? I am just a naive *desi*, a simple village woman, who doesn't even know which lipstick suits her complexion. I have failed both as a woman and as a wife. I couldn't even hold onto him in my bed. (*Typhoon*, p.32)

Gulshan believes that it is her social and moral responsibility to cater to her husband's sexual needs for which she should adorn her body. So instead of being angered at her husband for his infidelity she blames herself for failing to prevent such an occurrence. Barbara Eurich-Rascoe and Hendrike Vande Kemp (1997) in their book *Femininity and Shame; Women, Men and Giving Voice to the Feminine* explains that the word, "Shame is driven from a Middle English root which means to hide, to cover, from the German word *skem*, which means hide or skin, and from a Latin root which means shirt" (Eurich-Rascoe and Kemp, 1997, p.85). Donald Nathanson (1987) further explains:

Shame, like guilt, is an unpleasant emotion experienced as if it were directed by one agency of the self against another. Whereas guilt refers to punishment for wrongdoing, for violation of some sort of rule or

internal law, shame implies that some quality of the self has been brought into question. (Nathanson, 1987, p.4)

Significantly, Gulshan feels guilt and shame for her husband's action. Her guilt and shame stems from the low self-esteem which she holds towards her village bred body as opposed to the fashionable city dwelling Naghmana. Gulshan therefore tortures her body:

Leaning against the door, she pushed her wrist into her mouth - biting on the soft flesh. The primitive animal sound was suffocated. Feeling the pain, she pulled her wrist from her mouth and looked down at her dark teeth-marks. (Typhoon, p.21)

Gulshan suffers in shame and her body becomes the site of concern and blame. Brooks Bouson (2009) in *Embodied Shame: Uncovering Female Shame in Contemporary Women's Writings* analyses the writings of contemporary British and North American women authors who highlight how women embody shame as a result of a range of cultural and social factors including trauma, abusive parenting, sexual, racial and social denigration of women (Bouson, 2009). Bouson argues that, "Conceived of as defective or deficient from male norms and as potentially diseased, women have long been embodiments of shame in our culture, and, indeed, the female socialisation process can be viewed as a prolonged immersion in shame" (Bouson, 2009, p.2). In Pakistani society, it is the association of shame with female sexuality that renders women as embodiments of shame. Consequently, their lives more or less revolve around the principles of shame and honour. For example, it is a married woman's social and religious responsibility to cater to her husband's sexual needs. It is considered a matter of shame, especially for a wife, if her husband seeks other women for his sexual fulfilment. Haroon, by stealing away into the arms of another woman, exposes Gulshan's failure as a wife and thus Gulshan feels she has brought shame on herself. In a similar incident, as highlighted by Asif and Imtiaz (2011), in a passage from *Brick Lane* reveals how the economic prosperity of the wife, Jorina, is a matter of shame for her husband and his consequent sexual affair with another woman is seen as Jorina's fault:

Jorina has been shamed. Her husband goes to other women. She started working and everyone said he cannot feed her. Even though he

was working for himself, he was shamed. And because of this, he became reckless and started going with other women. So Jorina has brought shame on them all. (Cited in Asif and Imtiaz, 2011, p.1348)

As is evident, it is the female figure that is ultimately held responsible for bringing her husband's infidelity on herself. In a similar way, Gulshan feels that she has failed in the eyes of other people in satisfying the sexual needs of her husband. Her body is therefore a site of failure and shame. Similarly, Naghmana is accused of displaying her body to allure Haroon and is also shamed. However, there is also a minute reference to Haroon's personal attempt to 'desire' the 'other' woman for which he is held guilty, as Sardara, the milk woman comments, "I am sure she didn't physically drag him out of his wife's bed. Haroon went to her willingly didn't he?" (*Typhoon*, p.67). In spite of this, the major burden of shame is placed on Naghmana. It is her decorated, unveiled and alluring body which causes social disruption. Otutubikey Izugbara (2004) in his paper 'Patriarchal Ideology and Discourses of Sexuality in Nigeria', talks about the religious discourses on sexuality. In the context of Islamic discourse on female sexuality he asserts:

Female chastity is a celebrated value for Muslim women. To be chaste is to be a good woman and to remain so she must avoid publicity, loitering and unnecessary intermingling with men. Thus, good women are not expected to go out alone they are to be accompanied by their husband's or must do so in the company of other women. (Izugbara, 2004, p.17)

By travelling alone to a remote village unattended and by not observing purdah, Naghmana, creates quite a stir amongst the village people, men and women. They are all, including Siraj Din a village elder, offended by her appearance. The village people suspect her fashionable, city styled body as a potential cause of immorality in the village. Her modern and unveiled appearance elicits disapproval from the moment she enters the village and comes across Siraj Din:

She was a stranger in 'his' village and one who didn't attempt to cover her head in his presence. Siraj Din dismissed her salutation and pointedly ignoring her walked on...he turned his henna-dyed head and rested his green gaze on her bare arms and the thick curtain of hair spread over her right shoulder. (*Typhoon*, p.3)



Naghmana's uncovered head and thick curtain of untied hair signal the uncontrolled female sexuality capable of polluting Siraj Din's village. Afshan Jafar (2005) in 'Women, Islam, and the State in Pakistan' similarly comments, "Women's sexuality does not appear to be something that can be controlled by them - they are always sexual just by simply being. Women entice, seduce, and corrupt by the mere flash of a bare arm or a fly-away tuft of hair" (Jafar, 2005, p.42). Hajra, Gulshan's mother, similarly anticipates Naghmana's presence as a threat, "when I saw the slut with her open hair, flaunting her shameful body in front of everyone, I knew for sure then that she was the bearer of immorality to our village" (*Typhoon*, p.51). Naghmana's modern, unveiled body, which causes an upheaval in Chiragpur, exemplifies the disruptive nature of the uncontrolled female sexuality which is considered to be the source of 'fitna', a chaos in society. Elizabeth Shlala Leo (2005) explains that, "fitna has many meanings in the various contexts, such as: female desirability, female power, male weakness, social chaos and social disorder. The term is used interchangeably to mean any and all of these things" (Leo, 2005, p.135). The unveiled and adorned body of a Muslim woman is considered to attract men, incite lust and it therefore increases the chance of adultery. This is the main reason why Muslim women are instructed to cover themselves in public to avoid any seductive messages being conveyed to the opposite sex. Margot Badran (2009) in her chapter 'Body Politic(s): Women, Power, and Sexuality in Egypt' speaking in the context of women and sexuality asserts:

Learned Islamic text and popular belief also hold that women possess enormous sexual appetites (far greater than those of men), and that women's whole being, body and voice constitutes a sexualised entity. The word describing "the sexualised" in Arabic is *awra* which literally means genitalia. That which is *awra* must be covered... [Thus] women's entire body must be hidden and in traditional conservative culture even their voices. (Badran, 2009, p.170)

The notion of women having a greater sexual appetite is clearly echoed when Naghmana's aunt, on learning of Naghmana's adultery, immediately and aggressively responds to Naghmana, "If you were so desperate for a man, why didn't you tell us, for God's sake? We could have married you off" (*Typhoon*, p.54). In a similar incident in *The*

*Holy Woman* Habib, in his effort to prevent Zari Bano from marrying Sikandar, associates an element of desperation and lust with marriage and, in a way, accuses his daughter of wanting a man. Thus, shame is strategically used to restrict Zari Bano. However, by meeting Haroon in secrecy, Naghmana displays a similar sense of sexual desperation which is considered a matter of great shame and immodesty. Consequently, she is perceived as a slut, and not only shames herself but also her family. As Naghmana's aunt, Fatima, laments:

‘You have ruined me, Naghmana! Me - your widowed, childless aunt. Have you no shame, no sharm? You slut! I have lost our izzat, our family honour, because of you. You have dumped it all away and buried us all in the mud of disgrace’. Fatima yanked at Naghmana's hair again, as if that would somehow assuage her impotent rage and shame. (*Typhoon*, p.54)

Fatima claims that she has lost their family's honour due to Naghmana. As evident, it is the family, that Naghmana and Fatima belong to, that has lost its honour and not Fatima or Naghmana as individuals. In other words, Naghmana, as a woman, has no honour of her own so the question of losing it does not arise. As discussed before, as a woman she symbolises her family's honour so she is guilty of losing that honour and is made to feel ashamed. Confused and ashamed Naghmana vents her anger by cutting her hair. A symbolic shaming of herself, “They were all after my hair, Auntie. Fascinated, yet hated me for it. It was my pride and joy. Thus I offer them my greatest pride - my hair! I will leave this village without it’. Naghmana ruthlessly sheared straight across the thick bound plait at the nape of her neck” (*Typhoon*, p.231). By cutting her hair, Naghmana not only shames and punishes herself but also desexualises herself. She bears a startling resemblance with Zari Bano in *The Holy Woman* who also cuts her hair as a symbolic desexualisation. Both women actively re-appropriate their bodies as a reaction to shame.

Naghmana's bodily gestures clearly display her feeling of shame when Fatima questions her about her meeting with Haroon, “Naghmana's face paled. Then a horrified blush of shame seeped through her cheeks, sweeping right across her face, down to her neck” (*Typhoon*, p.47). However, it is the collective sense of shame that is reflected by the village people on the whole that makes Naghmana's shame permanent. Naghmana's

action not only brings shame upon herself but also her aunt as she exclaims, “we are doomed, you whore! What is there left for me to do, but to pull my hair and beat my breasts? That is what broken women do, isn’t it? You have broken me! I have nothing to live for!” (*Typhoon*, p.116). This reflects how a woman’s indecent action can have ramifications for all those associated, especially family members. Other characters such as Naimat Bibi and Kalsoom discuss this matter with each other, “Haroon was caught in a haram (forbidden) situation with another woman. Fatima’s niece! That witch who has come to plague our village...that shameless hussy! Can you believe it? My ears are scorched in shame” (*Typhoon*, p.51). As Naghmana is led to the kacheri by her aunt a neighbouring woman hurls a shoe at her from her roof top to indicate her anger and to shame Naghmana. Naghmana brings shame on the whole village and therefore all the people gather at the kacheri to witness and, in a way, to participate in punishing her. As Jafar (2005) notes, “the shame of a woman charged with adultery is not just hers, but her whole family’s. Thus punishment cannot be a private matter. There must be other witnesses in order to reinforce the fact that the woman has dishonoured her whole family and brought [shame] and disgrace upon them” (Jafar, 2005, p.45).

The kacheri therefore assumes the position of a battle ground where the sinners are summoned and shamed, watched by people, criticised, condemned and punished. Every villager has a right to attend this public gathering as every individual, man and woman, feels betrayed, awed and frustrated by this sin committed in their village. The kacheri also becomes a site of exposure, where sinners are exposed to public scrutiny and gaze. Naghmana’s body is therefore subjected to public viewing, as she sits with her head bowed and eyes focusing on the ground. Unable to bare the weight of a hundred pair of eyes focused in her direction, her body shrinks into her very self. Haroon, however, behaves in a very different and arrogant manner, “Haroon entered the courtyard, and everybody had turned. His head held high he strode towards the three chairs on one side of the table. Ignoring everyone, he sat down. He looked straight ahead at the horizon” (*Typhoon*, p.153). As evident, both Naghmana and Haroon respond differently as they are exposed in public. Whereas Haroon shows no signs of shame or guilt and displays a cold attitude, Naghmana, on the other hand, loses her charm, dignity and confidence. She dresses shabbily in her aunt’s clothes and wraps a chador around her to conceal and hide

herself, “Naghmana’s head bowed in shame before the spectators’ gaze. She let her aunt’s old muslin shawl slide further down to over her face to shield her from the hostile gazes” (*Typhoon*, p.158). Furthermore, Siraj Din refuses to pat Naghmana’s head, which is a gesture of blessing, as she enters the kacheri and bows her head before him. He thus further accentuates Naghmana’s shame, as the kacheri attendants’ note, “Siraj Din’s hand did not rise. It remained still on the table. Humiliation searing her body, Naghmana dumbly moved back. By this small gesture the village elder had shamed her well and truly and publically” (*Typhoon*, p.155). Thus shame is conveyed through people’s eyes, gestures and comments and Naghmana, unlike Haroon, responds to this shame by cowering beneath it whereas Haroon resists it by arrogance.

Naghmana is introduced as an educated, urban woman who is independent enough to drive herself to a remote village. However, it is incredible to note her lack of voice. In spite of her groomed personality, she is unable to claim her innocence or debate her position in the Kacheri. The confident woman that enters Chiragpur turns into a docile, shabby, and a meek woman, “her head and half of her face were hidden behind the folds of the old Muslin shawl. The shapeless grey linen suit camouflaged the youthful contours of her body” (*Typhoon*, p.144). Naghmana’s modern, revealing female figure is replaced by the loose, dull and shapeless drab of a village woman. In other words, Naghmana then physically resembles Gulshan, Haroon’s village wife. Haroon, the common link between both women merges their identity. As Haroon himself asserts, “if Naghmana is a Haramzadi<sup>21</sup>, then so is Gulshan because both are the same to me” (*Typhoon*, p.160). Haramzadi is the abusive term the villagers use to refer to Naghmana. Haroon’s attempt to refer to both of his wives with this term though seems inappropriate and is obviously an emotional reaction which is not intended to degrade his wives. Instead, Haroon intends to highlight the commonality between the two, emphasizing their equal status in his mind.

In the Kacheri Haroon discloses the nature of his relationship with Naghmana, briefly explaining how they had married secretly and separated whilst they were students, “For

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<sup>21</sup> A harsh, abusive and derogatory term used for a bad (illegitimate) woman. Haramzadi was the word; the villagers were using to refer to Naghmana, when they accused her of being a whore and stealing another woman’s husband.

you see Naghmana is my wife...for the first time that day, healthy colour seeped into Naghmana's cheeks, fanning them aglow with life. She was riding high on Haroon's love, a light glowing inside her" (*Typhoon*, p.166). It is important to note the power of the male voice, like his gaze. If the male gaze is considered penetrative, his voice too is shown to have an immense power to breathe life into the female body. Naghmana's body is perceived as shamed till Haroon's acknowledgment and his claim over her body, as a husband, allows her to reclaim her honour, regain from a pit of shame to the pride of being possessed. The point of emphasis here is the lack of self-value and inability of the female figure to claim her own identity which, as is evident, can only come through a legitimate association with a male figure. In other words, Naghmana needs Haroon to declare their relationship in public while she sits silently. This indicates that shame has a greater effect on women which restricts them in more than one way. Naghmana is confused and too ashamed to speak or confess her love for Haroon.

As it becomes known that Naghmana is still legally Haroon's wife the turn of events leave everyone lost for words. However, Naghmana realises that continuing her relationship with Haroon would be devastating for Gulshan and her son and thus demands a divorce from Haroon. Consequently, Siraj Din, eager to restore order to his village, pressurises Haroon to divorce Naghmana in the kacheri. It is evident that Naghmana sees her divorce from Haroon as her punishment and a price she should pay for the shame and upheaval she has brought to her aunt and the village. Siraj Din misuses his authority and pressurises the unwilling Haroon to pronounce thrice a verbal divorce in the presence of the entire village. As the kacheri ends Siraj Din not only verbally praises Naghmana for sacrificing her husband for Gulshan but also restores her lost honour by patting her on her head, as the kacheri attendants similarly note, "Miraculously, Siraj Din's hand reached out to her bowed head and fell flat on it. The villagers gasped. The badkismat (unfortunate) woman had been re-instated" (*Typhoon*, p.174). Naghmana pays her price to regain her lost honour by not only divorcing Haroon but also through symbolically desexualising herself by cutting her hair and removing her makeup as Fatima notes, "her face was totally devoid of make-up. Her lips were pale as if colour had been smudged out of them. Her head was bowed, her shorn hair scraped tightly away from her face and fixed into a simple knot at the back" (*Typhoon*, p.238). The kacheri attendants leave for

their homes with heavy hearts and Naimat Bibi and Kalsoom especially feel ashamed for spreading the news of Naghmana and Haroon's adultery.

Naghmana's shame, like a contagious disease, spreads throughout the village of Chiragpur. Kaneez, a young widow, who also attends the kacheri, is reminded of a similar public shaming she experienced on her wedding. She recalls her wedding celebrations when, sitting amongst a gathering of women, a passing voice reveals that she is in fact the second choice of her husband. A sense of rejection accompanied by this public exposure ruthlessly strips Kaneez of her identity. She felt shame and jealousy as she further discovers that Fatima, the woman her husband wanted to marry, is also present amongst the women. This 'other' woman exposes Kaneez's shame, by rendering her undesirable. As if one blow to her confidence was not enough, Kaneez further faces extreme rejection and shame as she musters up the courage to confide in her husband that she was raped as a teenager only to be rejected as Kaneez informs her sister, "While one raped me, the other humiliated me. I will never forget...a look of revulsion crossed his face...it was almost as if he believed it was my fault" (*Typhoon*, p.211). Kaneez exposes the haplessness of women who due to lack of support and social stigma have no option but to silently bear the shame of sexual victimisation. And in cases where sexually victimised women have the financial means and family support they again choose to suffer silently rather than to bring shame and lose family honour. As Kaneez, years after her rape, finally confides in her sister she voices her plight, "'tell you all,' Kaneez threw her sister an agonised look. 'Shroud you all with my chador of shame! My whole clan - my khandan. How could I possibly tell you about my shameful dark secret?'" (*Typhoon*, p.209).

It is worth mentioning the victimisation of rape victims in Pakistan, as they have to provide eye witnesses to prove their sexual encounter as a rape rather than pre-marital or extra-marital sex. Raped women in most cases are sent to prison and punished as they fail to provide enough evidence to prove their rape. According to the Hudood Ordinance<sup>22</sup> rules regarding rape and adultery, a woman is punished for adultery if she

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on the rules of The Hudood Ordinance regarding adultery please see:

fails to provide at least four eye witnesses of her rape. This absurd rule was passed by General Zia-ul-Haq and it remains a major reason for the large number of rape victims being locked up in jails. This in turn proves to be a major reason why rape victims are afraid to seek legal help and choose to either remain quiet or to commit suicide. Therefore many women silently bare sexual violations without any resistance or legal help. This remains another strategy through which the patriarchal culture imposes silence on the female sexuality.

Shahla Haeri (2002) in her book *No Shame for the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women* highlights the absurdity and cruelty of the Hudood Ordinance regarding rape victims. She explains how, “Women’s predicaments in such situations - given their fear inspired reluctance to pursue justice - are complex and multifaceted. Their misgivings owe in part to the shame of dishonour they and their families feel, in part to the intimidation by the agents of law and order and in part to the equation of rape with adultery under the Hudood Ordinance” (Haeri, 2002, p. 24). Rahat Imran’s (2008) article ‘Deconstructing Islamisation in Pakistan: Sabiha Sumar Wages Feminist Cinematic Jihad through a Documentary Lens’ exposes the debilitating and oppressive impacts of the Hudood ordinance on women as:

Nothing more than patriarchal ploys to subjugate and terrorise women, particularly the already marginalised segments who are most likely to be economically dependent on men, illiterate, and without recourse to legal aid or even understanding of the laws under which they can be implicated or convicted. (Imran, 2008, p.25)

The underlying theme of all the political, legitimised oppression of women remains to assert control on female sexuality to keep women bound within the debilitating structures of the misogynist patriarchal society. If women under such circumstances succeed in proving their innocence it is a life of shame for them as the society never

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Shahidullah, M, S. (2012) *Comparative Criminal Justice Systems: Global and Local Perspectives*. USA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.

forgives a fallen woman even if proved innocent. Thus, Kaneez's shame like a ghost resides with her, and she begins to loathe her body as she expresses to her sister:

You rave about my beauty, my attractive face and statuesque body. I loathe both! I sometimes think if I had been ugly or plain, the beast would have left me alone and not made me his prey. If I had been ugly I am sure he would never have glanced at me. You used to envy my rosy cheeks, my beautiful blooming body, but it had been marked as his conquest. I detest and hate this body of mine! Sabra, it is unclean! (Typhoon, p.210)

Kaneez's body becomes a site of frustration and disgust as Kaneez tries to wash away her shame by countless showers a day, "I have had a thousand baths in the last twelve years, but I can never clean myself; never purify myself. I shall remain forever soiled" (Typhoon, p.210). Confined and disgraced in the prison of her body, Kaneez lives in fear and anguish as shame and self-disgust deepens within her soul. Perhaps the following lines from Kishwar Naheed's poem 'Lab-i-goya' (speaking lips) could better encapsulate Kaneez's emotional state, "I am disgraced in the prison of my body, and you are in my capture, bearing on your body the scars of painless imprisonment" (cited in Ananthram, 2009, p.215). This particular poem reflects how women's bodies carry the burden of social and cultural norms whereas men seem to be free of these scars. Kaneez becomes isolated and confines herself within her home. Her rape makes her fearful as she begins to hate not only herself but any man who desires to marry her. She refuses repeated marriage proposals from a young landlord of a neighbouring village, Younis Raees. Kaneez's body becomes a living shame which confines her in time and place.

Other female characters similarly find their bodies under the firm grip of cultural values and very intimate decisions, like marriage and child bearing, are strictly guided according to these values. Their bodies become sites that no longer remain personal to them but become 'cultural spaces' where religious, social and political battles are fought. Women in such circumstances often find their lives directed by these social pressures. For example, Jamila, the thirty seven years old mother of three children, sees her pregnancy as a matter of great embarrassment. She considers this addition to her family from the society's view, of how people would react towards her pregnancy. With grown up



children, especially a teenage daughter, Jamila struggles to naturally abort her unborn child to escape public exposure and shame. Jamila does not clearly voice her pregnancy. As Naimat Bibi and Kalsoom come to visit her and find her ill and vomiting they at once are alarmed, “you are not! Kalsoom exclaimed loudly” (*Typhoon*, p.72). In other words, her pregnancy was too shameful to be packed into words. Instead, the message was silently enacted, and cleverly understood:

When Jamila sheepishly looked away, Naimat Bibi and Kalsoom exchanged a quick glance, silently questioning each other. Then before their startled gazes they had their answer. They saw Jamila’s body double up as she leant over the basin on the floor. ‘You are not!’ Kalsoom exclaimed loudly. Jamila nodded miserably at her two friends. (*Typhoon*, p.72)

Jamila expresses her shame before her friends, “Oh, Allah Pak, if I could only bury myself in some hole? How am I ever going to show my face and later my bulging waistline to my male and other village elders? I am so ashamed” (*Typhoon*, p.74). Jamila’s sense of shame deepens as she realises that her daughter, a young teenager, has reached her puberty. Her growing and bulging body would expose her in her daughter’s eyes. As Jamila notices her teenage daughter in a position to overhear their conversation she cautions her friends, “hush!” Jamila signalled, pointing a finger to the open door. ‘I don’t want my daughter to hear any of your bawdy teasing” (*Typhoon*, p.76). Through Jamila, Shahraz highlights a sense of fear and shame women express and feel towards pregnancy at a later age especially if the woman has teenage daughter(s). This reflects a sense of conscious silence maintained on the issue of sexuality especially between mothers and daughters. A similar silence is maintained regarding Haroon and Naghmana’s meeting near the well. Though the novel does not make clear reference to any sexual encounter between the pair, however, it is the darkness of the night, the privacy of the meeting, the intimate embrace and Naghmana’s swollen lip that are the clues to their mysterious meeting by which the village women try to decipher the nature and the extent of their meeting, “do you really think they have done *that*? You know what I mean’. A warm blush spreading fast over Sardara’s brown cheeks” (*Typhoon*, p.65). As evident there is a kind of purdah or secrecy maintained on the discussions of sexual matters.

In other words, matters of sex and sexuality are kept out of public discussions, especially around very young women in case it may corrupt their impressionable minds. Expressing too much knowledge of sexual matters, especially by unmarried women, is often and easily related to being immodest - *bey sharam* - meaning 'devoid of shame'. Being devoid of shame is a commonly used phrase to indicate a person who has no integrity and dignity and has, through some action, brought shame onto him/herself. So ignorance of sexual matters or keeping such discussions as discrete and secret as possible reflects the proper enactment of *purdah* and shame read as *sharam*. So shame is not just a negative feeling which calls a person's action into question, but also a positive and healthy emotion. It is an attitude which needs to be properly displayed in public. Thus *purdah*, honour and shame are not fixed notions but flexible and interdependent concepts which acquire multiple meanings according to circumstances. Any deviance from a set standard of these concepts or failure to perform at the right time and place, and in a right manner, may cause serious consequences. It is important to note that both men and women in Islam are required to observe their share of *purdah* and shame but the present patriarchal culture has rendered this division unjust as men place the burden of *purdah*, *sharam* and honour almost entirely on the women of their family as Badran (2009) rightly notes:

Chastity as sexual behaviour confined to marriage is religiously prescribed by Christianity and Islam alike for both sexes, but in these religious cultures not in practice imposed on men. Chaste women's bodies must bear the weight of patriarchal honour. The honour of men is not produced through their own chastity, but through association with the chaste bodies of their women - the women in their family. (Badran, 2009, p.171)

Thus, Naghmana and Kaneez both suffer with shame and the onus of losing family honour is placed entirely on Naghmana's shoulders. Though Gulshan's mother uses abusive language to shame Haroon, no one hurls a shoe at him, drags him by the hair, or reprimands him for losing his family honour. Interestingly, whereas women flock to shame Naghmana, no man from the village is shown to chastise Haroon. This clearly indicates that a patriarchal society allows a man to handle his own issues but a woman's

actions, especially those deemed improper, has to be a public concern and matter. This indicates a social control on women's bodies, behaviour and, in short, on their lives.

Christiane Schlote (2008) in her chapter 'Keeping Body and Soul Together: Rukhsana Ahmad's Critical Examinations of Female Body Politics in Pakistan and Britain' describes a female protagonist Reshma who, after the birth of her three children, decides to abort her fourth child. She also decides to sterilise herself and undergoes an operation only to be consequently thrown out by her outraged husband. Reshma further faces severe criticism from her mother who says she should better have died before bringing such shame on the family (Schlote, 2008, p.169). A woman's decision regarding her own body sought in desperation, as further pregnancies would be dangerous and her husband insisted on more children, is seen as her assertion of control over her body which evidently belongs to her husband and therefore represents a punishable crime. Similarly, Kaneez seems confused regarding her pregnancy and her attempt to secretly abort her unborn child may be an easy way out for her. What remains striking is that both women realise that their bodies are under external control. Whereas Reshma faces the consequences of taking control of her body into her own hands, Kaneez on the other hand, reluctantly accepts her pregnancy. This highlights the cultural grip on the female body and the sheer helplessness women often face regarding reproductive choices. In such cases, emotional conflict, shame, rage and haplessness are common feelings that women live with in patriarchal societies. As Susan Bordo (2003) observes:

What, after all, is more personal than the life of the body? And for women associated with the body and largely confined to a life centred on the body (both the beautification of one's own body and the reproduction, care, and maintenance of the bodies of others), culture's grip on the body is a constant, intimate fact of everyday life. (Bordo, 2003, p.17)

This unseen yet ever-present grip on women's lives that Bordo points to, for Muslim women, is strengthened by associating shame with sex and sexuality. As women are considered to be more sexually promiscuous and demanding, as discussed before, women embody a deeper sense of shame compared to men. This also explains why their bodies are required to be fully covered. It may not be wrong to assert that a woman as a

whole is embodied sex and embodied shame. Associating shame with sexuality and a conscious silence on sexual issues is used as a disciplinary measure for men and women and also to specifically control female sexuality. This can explain the sexual repression in a Muslim society that Sidhwa alludes to in her novels. Since women are far more restricted within their homes and have to observe a greater degree of purdah as compared to men, consequently, women not only remain more ignorant of sexual matters but also at a greater risk of sexual victimisation, often at the hands of male relatives, such as Kaneez.

In the last part of the novel, the various female characters are shown to either dominate their shame as Kaneez does or to lose their life in an emotional turmoil against shame as Naghmana does. Kaneez overcomes her shame by voicing and expressing her shame before Younis Raees as she meets him near the village well. Kaneez and her younger sister Sabra, make their way towards the village well, concealed and hidden in their chadors, to mask their appearance so that nobody would recognise them:

One figure stalled, disappearing into the shadows beside a tree near the village path. The other, tall one, was steadily moving in his direction. One end of a chador was held straight across woman's face, concealing the lower half, giving her total anonymity in the darkness. (*Typhoon*, p.309)

Kaneez's cloaked appearance can be taken as her veil of shame that Kaneez shrouds herself with:

We meet here in the middle of the night, our assignation cloaked by darkness. It is this night's dark mantel that has helped me to hide my blushes of shame from you. I could never look you in the eye in broad daylight, let alone lay before you my sullied past and chador of shame. The darkness and the accompanying silence of the world around us have helped me to uncloak myself - to tell you about my past. (*Typhoon*, p.316)

The darkness allows Kaneez a refuge, a 'space' to claim as her own where she can express her shame before Younis Raees, the man who desires to marry her. As Kaneez

expresses her inability to 'look him in the eye in the broad day light' it highlights two levels of exposure, the daylight and the direct eye contact, the gaze. It is this double veil, double concealment and double darkness, in the form of the 'dark night' and the veil, as Kaneez herself confesses, that aids her in voicing out her shame. By voicing it out, she actually wages a battle against it. As she confesses her rape to him, she doesn't only expose herself but shames herself again to be freed from shame. When she informs Younis Raees that if he still desires her, "it is through a door of shame [that he] will be entering" (*Typhoon*, p.318). Kaneez actually has walked through the shame herself. By voicing her shame, Kaneez manages to separate the shame that she has nurtured for many years.

Naghmana's struggle with her shame is also presented in the third part of the novel. As the old man is nearing death Naghmana is summoned back to set free his guilt-struck soul. We learn that Naghmana has remarried a professor in the city and is the mother of two teenage children. Her journey back to the village is sudden and urgent as the old man is on his death bed. Naghmana's return to the village of Chiragpur proves to be fatal, as her husband is shocked to learn of her past and in anger leaves the village without her. The village people who had participated in the Kacheri twenty years earlier recognise her. This is another exposure, a strange Kacheri in its own self as she is again subjected to public gaze. The female figure that was once shunned is elevated to a position of a liberator. She is assumed to have the power to set free the guilty soul from their sufferings. Ironically she was considered, on the previous occasion, to have the power to allure, and was considered, lustful, evil, and a witch as Kalsoom comments, "That is the extent of her evil powers - the magic (jadoo) she has woven around our Haroon, that he left his wife's bed and went seeking hers. We don't know how many taweez she made him drink!" (*Typhoon*, p.65). Naghmana's evil powers shift to the opposite side of the scale as she now seems to possess the power to heal, forgive, redeem and free the guilty soul of Siraj Din. Pam Morris (1993) offers a valuable insight regarding the female figure and men's ability to endow them with abilities for the construction of their own masculinity:

By seeing women as other to themselves, as not-men, men can read into 'femininity' whatever qualities are needed to construct their sense of the masculine. So, a mythicized 'woman' becomes the imaginary location of male dreams, idealisations and fears: throughout different cultures femininity is found to present nature, beauty, and goodness, but also evil, enchantment, corruption and death. (Morris, 1993, p.14)

The female figure is seldom allowed recognition as an individual. She either has the capacity to do extreme goodness or extreme evil. In other words, the patriarchal society either throws her down into the pits of shame and degradation through violence and oppression or elevates her to supreme heights by associating Godly qualities to her thereby 'de-humanising' her mainly to serve their purpose.

As Naghmana returns to Chiragpur, the familiar places and people peel away her wounds of shame which time has managed to heal. In desperation she tries to escape but the place where the kacheri was held, the village people, the old man, the very atmosphere seemed to have turned against her as her memories like poisonous snakes lunge at her, "They are everywhere, Jahangir! Save me! Her eyes flicked open, a delirious look in them. The snakes she whispered" (*Typhoon*, p.332). The shame that lies hidden in Naghmana, gains a momentum inside her, like a typhoon, a flood of emotions, rage and anger waiting to explode, "the dam cracked and burst. Twenty years of festered poison, now spluttered out of her mouth" (*Typhoon*, p.334). Like Kaneez, Naghmana shames herself again to free herself from it. She owns her shame, and acknowledges it in front of her second husband, Jahangir. However, he is not as forgiving and accepting as Younis Raees who helps Kaneez come out of her cloister of shame. Naghmana feels she is facing another kacheri and this time her judge is Jahangir. As Naghmana strives to explain the events of that night with Haroon, Jahangir hastily overlooks the fact that Naghmana was still legally Haroon's wife at that point and sarcastically inquires, "What were you doing in his arms, if you weren't a whore?" (*Typhoon*, p.335). Naghmana is held answerable again; her shame resurfaces as she is required to explain why she agreed to meet Haroon secretly at night. Jahangir is unable to tolerate Naghmana's sullied past and leaves the village without her. Unlike Haroon, Naghmana is unable to come out of her shame or, in other words, she is not easily forgiven for her perceived sin. Naghmana is rendered to a

state of madness as she cries in pain and anger. She is unable to bear her misery and curses Siraj Din's grave:

She stared down at the grave for a long time. Finally her body fell on top of the mound of soil. Grabbing a handful of it and the flower petals in her fist she cried down to him, 'you evil man! You wrenched me from the arms of my first beloved husband. Now you called me back to your evil village to rob me of my second! May you rot in hell!' (*Typhoon*, p.340)

Naghmana's frantic cries, her dishevelled appearance especially her neglect of her dupatta (head scarf) indicate a state of loss, the loss of a husband, a home and honour. She wonders like a lost soul as the heroin of Anamika's 'Without a Place' expresses:

'When hair, women and nails  
fall from place  
they remain nowhere'...  
And panic would freeze us girls  
in our places.  
'Place? What is a place?'  
'Girls are air, sunshine, earth,  
they don't have a home!  
'Those who have no home  
What place can they have?'

(Quoted in Rosenstein, 2007)

After losing her second husband, Naghmana loses her sense of belonging. Fallen out of her place she is left with no place. The mother of the protagonist Rani in Rukhsana Ahmad's *The Hope Chest* asserts the importance of marriage, children and home in the lives of women in the following words, "what's a woman's life without marriage and children [...] haan? Nothing if you ask me. Worthless then the bits of straw blown about in the wind, much less" (Schlote, 2008, p.170). This stands as very emblematic of Naghmana's position as she, in a state of loss, makes her way towards the village water-well. A young girl, on her way back home from school, witnesses Naghmana's state:

An uncertain smile on her face, the young girl stared in surprise at the older woman's bare head and grimy white clothes. It was as if she had

fallen into a dust ditch. The stranger (Naghmana) seemed to be looking right through her. Naghmana walked through the cauliflower fields... then the village water-well was before her. (*Typhoon*, p.341)

Shahraz interweaves the village water-well into the plot which serves several purposes and stands as a powerful symbol associated with shame. To elaborate, the water-well, like the train in Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, is a silent witness of Naghmana's misery and sorrow. It offers within its circular boundaries a 'space' which is dark, deep and gloomy. The water-well is a powerful and well-known symbol in South Asian Literature, specifically in post-colonial partition literature, as hundreds of women jumped into water-wells and drowned in order to escape rape and abduction. Generally, in South Asian literature the water-well is the hub of female activity and the meeting place for the village women who, on a daily basis, fetch water from the village water-well. These water-wells are included in the private space and are considered as a female domain just as the economic market place is largely a male domain (Shaheed, 1991, p.146). The Hindi and Punjabi cinema often pictures the village water-well as a meeting place for lovers or as a part of a romantic song sequence. The water-well in *Typhoon* serves similar purposes of providing water to the village inhabitants, a meeting place for the lovers, and finally a refuge for Naghmana who drowns her shamed existence into its depths. Shame in Indian and Pakistani society is symbolically referred to as a stain, a scar and a mark of disgrace. Since these impurities can be better removed through washing away with water, therefore, the concept of shame and water is closely associated. Furthermore, the commonly used phrase of *sharam say pani pani hona* (literally meaning to become water with shame) again conjures the image of a person drowning in shame, like drowning in water. Thus a woman who causes shame and stains her character has to wash away this disgrace. Since the water-wells were an easy access to women this explains why women chose to drown themselves during the partition riots and continue to do so till this day in remote villages where water-wells are still in use.

The concept of shame and wetness is associated on various occasions throughout the novel with the image of drowning and burying oneself. Naghmana's aunt on discovering the alleged adultery points out the village water-well as the most suitable place where



she should drown her 'muddied self' and the shame she has caused in the village, "Go and bury yourself or better drown yourself in the village well. For that is the only place you and your shame belong" (*Typhoon*, p.56). Naghmana, realises that, as pointed out by her aunt, 'the village water-well' is the only place where she belongs, the only place, willing to accommodate her, as she, lost and forlorn, embraces its welcoming and beckoning smiles:

Her blurred eyes were fixed on the dark surface of the water. The shimmering, mysterious pool smiled up at her and beckoned. She smiled back. At peace with herself. The shadow grew nearer and nearer and then met the welcoming dark surface. (*Typhoon*, p.342)

She embraces a death by drowning herself, in the same well which was the silent witness to her secret meeting with Haroon that led to her shame. Though Haroon was her husband, yet Naghmana's shame at being labelled and referred to as a whore leaves a permanent mark on her, as if her body was written over with a permanent marker, unable to be erased. Thus, whereas Kaneez manages to exorcize shame from her body and vows to make a new start with Younis Raees, Naghmana is unable to wash away her shame and chooses to end her life.

Interestingly, Sidhwa's main female character in her novel *Water* (2006) Kalyani, a young widow, forced into prostitution, also drowns herself in a river to rid herself of shame. Kalyani falls in love with a young man called Narayan and as they plan to marry, Kalyani discovers that he is the son of the same Brahman man she has been sent to spend the night with on many occasions. Unable to face the shame and degradation she drowns herself:

Kalyani knew she had no choice, there was only one avenue open to her. She dragged herself listlessly through the dark alleys to the ghats<sup>23</sup>. She took one step into the shallow water at the river edge...and walked slowly into the river until the water came up to her knees. She bent to

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<sup>23</sup> Ghats are bodies of water with step leading into it mostly found in India where Hindus usually bathe in the holy rivers to wash away their sins. The Ghats are used for both mundane and religious/holy purposes. The widow ashram described in Sidhwa's *Water* is located near a river where all the widows prayed and common people came to ritually bathe to rid themselves of their sins.

splash her face with the sacred water that flowed from Shiva's head, and smeared it all over her face and hair. She clasped her hands in prayer for a moment. Then she calmly walked into the river until her short hair floated in an inky stain on the water. Ma Ganga had claimed her daughter. (*Water*, pp.177-178)

The river (water) here is referred to as Ma (mother). Kalyani is rejected by the ashram matron, who fore warned her of the dire consequences of her elopement. Kalyani realises that she would be subjected to further rejections and shame once it becomes known that she has been Narayan's father's mistress. In this situation Kalyani felt forced to embrace the mother water whose deep and ever encompassing graces beckoned her to dissolve into its blossoms. Kalyani sees herself as sexually transgressive, polluted and shamed, so she embraces the kind and welcoming depths of the mother water to wash away her shame forever.

Both novels by Shahraz, *The Holy Woman* and *Typhoon*, capture how men control and exploit women by enforcing bodily associations of honour, shame and modesty. Further, women are ingrained to uphold these false notions of honour of their men even, at the cost of facing shame. For example, Zulaikha, Siraj Din's wife, is presented as a strong woman expecting an equal position to her husband:

Zulaikha was made of the firmer stuff...she saw to all his needs, but she never bowed down to him either in gesture or in words, always returning the proud taunt, 'Allah Pak is my master! You are a human being, only a mortal-like me. Treat me with respect and equality. We are a cloak, a garment unto one another. You do not have any special power over me, Siraj Din'. (*Typhoon*, p.125)

Zulaikha seems to be aware of her duties to her husband and respects him but also demands to be respected:

In the company of other people, she treated him with courtesy and respect. Behind closed doors she was like a cat at times, but in the public arena she adopted the demure look of a dutiful wife, who took her place with pride beside her husband. Always making sure no one tarnished his Shan and his izzat, his honour and respect in the eyes of his fellow villagers. (*Typhoon*, p.127)

Regardless of her apparently bold demeanour, Zulaikha finds it difficult to break the social decorum, to challenge her husband in public and to tell him that he was being unfair. Like Shahzada, Zari Bano, Gulshan and Naghmana, she is also numbed into silence.

Zulaikha was about to cross the courtyard to join her husband when his cold, clipped words of divorce turned her to stone...she wanted to shout to him, to end this farce, but her lips sealed with decades of decorum and social propriety, wouldn't obey. A good wife doesn't make her husband lose face in public. She desperately tried catching her husband's gaze, but he was ruthlessly bent on avoiding her. (*Typhoon*, p.171)

Zulaikha's timely intervention could have prevented Siraj Din from the folly. But social decorum, devised by men through an unjust division of shame, honour and purdah restricts women into silence, obedience and endless loyalty to their men. Zulaikha chooses to save her husband from public humiliation and shame but is unable to intervene in his court of law, the kacheri.

Thus, women are handicapped into passive acceptance as men, in their positions of authority, lay out rules of right and wrong for them. As demonstrated women not only realise this bodily manipulation and suffer injustice but also make efforts to resist these enclosures according to their capacity. An overt rebellion is not always possible as it may carry dangerous consequences, or is made impossible, as discussed in these two chapters on *The Holy Woman* and *Typhoon*, but there are always possibilities for a covert resistance even through an apparent acceptance. This is demonstrated in the next chapter based on Umera Ahmad's novel.

## **Chapter no. 5**

### **The Self discovered and Lost in Umera Ahmad's *Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan* (My self is a speck that is undefined)**

Umera Ahmad, a prolific female writer of present day Pakistan stands as a widely read and appreciated writer. Though Ahmad's novel *Peer-e-Kamil* brought her fame, her screen plays and novelettes are equally popular, especially among women. Some of her most notable works include *Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan* (2000), *Lahasil* (2000), *Amar Bail* (2004), *Thora Sa Asmaan* (2006), *Man-o-salwa* (2007) and plays *Doraha* (2009), *Quiad-e-Tanhai* (2011), and *Uraan* (2011). Ahmad's writings are not only translated in several languages, including English, but her novels are increasingly being televised. Ahmad's writings expose a social hostility towards women who attempt to defy a traditionally endorsed image of passive and obedient Muslim women.

*Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan*, allows for the examination of the paradoxes and restrictions that Muslim women suffer, especially in matters regarding sexuality. This novel is in the process of being translated into English. Ahmad writes in the Urdu language and this is one of the reasons why she stands as the most popular contemporary and widely read author in Pakistan. English language is only used and understood by a small proportion of the Pakistani population of which women are even smaller in number. Therefore, Urdu literature and fiction finds a greater audience in Pakistan. Furthermore, Ahmad's middle class upbringing and life style allows her to associate and reach out through her writings with other middle class women. Therefore most of Ahmad's works centre on female characters of the middle classes. Ahmad does not limit her characters within any particular socio-economic class, but experiments with the possible hurdles, invisible boundaries and limitations that may be associated with people's lives belonging to different walks of life. Similarly, her female characters, across her authored works, present an array of dynamic personalities from house-wives to working women, from silent, passive and victimised figures to active, bold and daring women who possess the capacity and devise ways to resist patriarchal oppression. Like *Sidhwa* and *Shahraz*,

Ahmad also shows an underlying struggle of female identity that remains an identifying feature of her works. As the novel under discussion is still in the process of being translated, a brief plot summary of the novel is provided before close examination and analysis.

The novel opens with a young girl, Sara, coming to stay with her Uncle Arfeen, whom she has never met before. She gives Arfeen a letter, written by her mother Saba, which requests Arfeen to look after Sara. Arfeen is bewildered and gratified to have discovered Sara, however becomes heartbroken to learn of Saba's death. As Sara begins to live with Arfeen and his son in their house, she learns of her mother's past life. She comes to know that her mother was Arfeen's first cousin and was initially married to him. She becomes a victim of her mother-in-law's intense jealousy as shortly after their marriage Arfeen's mother accuses Saba of adultery with Aadil, another male cousin. To validate her accusation she swears over the Holy Quran. Saba's vehement pleas of innocence fall on deaf ears (as no one could imagine that Arfeen's mother, an apparently devoted and religious woman, would dare lie on the Quran).

Saba is divorced on the spot and is later married off to a much older man, as a second wife. Her troubles do not end and as Saba becomes pregnant; her husband refuses to accept the child and divorces her. Saba, a twice divorced woman, disowned by the family, begins to make her living by initially working as a house maid and later, after the birth of her daughter, Sara, she works in a factory. She is once located by her Uncle (Arfeen's father) so that her dying aunt, suffering from last stage cancer, could beg forgiveness for her sin<sup>24</sup>. Arfeen's mother begs forgiveness and confesses of plotting against Saba. Saba reluctantly makes a short visit to her uncle's house to meet her dying aunt. After forgiving her she silently leaves again refusing to accept sympathetic offers of returning to them. She even refuses to re-marry Arfeen who by then was a widower with one son. She disappears with her daughter Sara leaving all her family guilty and ashamed.

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<sup>24</sup> It is cultural practice generally in Muslim countries but specifically in Pakistan that a person on their death bed requests his/her family, friends especially those who may have conflicts with him/her to forgive the dying person and pray for their journey into the next world. For this reason people are especially summoned to depart the dying person with prayers.

Years later, as Saba becomes ill, she instructs her daughter to go to Arfeen's house in case she dies. Thus, shortly after Saba passes away, Sara moves to live with her uncle.

The title of the novel, *Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan* literally translates as my self is a speck (tiny particle) that is undefined. In other words, the main female figure of the novel, Saba, is suggesting that in the wider scheme of the universe generally and in the male defined world specifically, she, as a woman, is allowed so little existence that it is hard to define. This very suggestive title reflects the little space women are given in patriarchal societies. It also reflects the female desire to challenge this social injustice by seeking to define and carve out her own identity and place within the male dominated society. As Saba is rejected and rendered homeless, she does not lose hope but makes all the efforts to support herself and her young daughter. Saba hides her bitter past from her daughter whereas Sara, as she grows older, remains curious to know about her extended family.

Sidhwa and Shahraz's female figures struggle under feudal and tribal customs, between domestic and social issues, Ahmad in her novel looks at middle class women living in the non-feudal environment of Punjab province who struggle within similar debilitating structures. In other words, Sidhwa, Shahraz and Ahmad may talk about women of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, of differing spatial and temporal settings, under different political situations, however what keeps all three of these women bound together is the range of startling similarities and measures of patriarchy, specifically the objectification of the female body and sexuality, which runs across the works of these three authors. Saba presents a woman who desires a change in her life. Like Shahraz's Zari Bano, Saba is awakened to the harsh reality that her society sees a woman as inferior to a man. Male control and authority over women is socially accepted and exercised in day to day life as a norm.

*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan* captures the plight of women at the backdrop of a disintegrating classic patriarchal structure within Pakistani society. Deniz Kandiyoti, as mentioned before in chapter one, describes Pakistan as geographically located within a patriarchal belt where 'classic patriarchy' governs the social system (Kandiyoti, 1988, p.278). Most of Ahmad's male characters travel abroad or to neighbouring cities for education or work

and her female characters, such as Saba, strives for higher education and financial independence. Ahmad thus presents Pakistani society amidst a shift or a breakdown of classic patriarchy, as younger men leave their father's home and take their wives with them to new places. Saba's aunt, who later becomes her mother-in-law, presents as a woman who probably led her life within a strict extended family and who strongly resents Saba's aspirations for education and considers her a wild woman. Saba's uncle, who holds supreme authority over all the family matters, marries both of his daughters with minimal levels of education. On the other hand, he allows his only son, Arfeen Abbas, to travel abroad for higher education. Saba's father has travelled to the USA and in his absence Arfeen's father holds an authority over Saba's family. So when Saba insists on joining a university, she has to seek her uncle's permission. Saba's never ending passion for her studies make her unfavourable for her entire extended family and particularly for Arfeen's parents.

Arfeen's mother is over-possessive of her only son, and becomes furious as Arfeen, on his return from the USA, decides to marry Saba. As Kandiyoti (1988) explains:

Women's life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughter-in-law...Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their life-long loyalty is an enduring preoccupation. Older women have a vested interest in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim son's primary allegiance. (Kandiyoti, 1988, p.279)

Saba's mother-in-law is unable to bear the fact that Arfeen plans to take Saba to the USA after their marriage. She sees her son's romantic association as a threat to her bond with him. She is unable to dissuade him so schemes a plan to defile Saba's character through accusing her of adultery.

Her younger daughter's marriage ceremony provides her with an ideal opportunity to shame Saba before a large gathering of wedding guests. She achieves her purpose by tricking Saba and Aadil into a room, on the pretext of an errand, and locks them in. Then

she calls her husband and gathers other family members outside that room to show that Saba and Aadil have been caught together in a room. She informs everyone that she has witnessed their shameful act. The situation becomes intense and a Kacheri is organised by Arfeen's father and Arfeen's mother falsely swears on the Holy Quran to prove herself. As swearing over the Holy Quran is accepted without question, due to the supreme validation and veneration associated with the book, Saba's pleas fall on deaf ears as no one is willing to believe her. Furthermore, Aadil's escape from the situation further complicates the situation for Saba as her mother-in-law exclaims, "so if he was not guilty why did he run away and hide his face in shame?" (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p. 34). Saba becomes helpless and Arfeen, in a fit of anger, divorces her.

Sidhwa, Shahraz and Ahmad have shown different ways of misappropriating religious rules and values in victimising women. Whereas Sidhwa's Ayah becomes a religious identity (Hindu) and suffers physically and emotionally during the partition at the hands of her Muslim admirer, Shahraz's Zari Bano like Ahmad's Saba also suffers as religious values are exploited to victimise them. Ahmad, through Saba's predicament, shows how easy it is to exploit women through their sexuality. Even a slight accusation can place women in situations where they often fail to prove their innocence. As a punishment for sullyng the family honour, Saba is not only divorced on the spot by Arfeen but she is married off to a much older man, a widower with four children.

Stories of such atrocities abound with countless cases where women accused of adultery are killed by the family members (mostly fathers and brothers, even nephews and cousins) in the name of honour<sup>25</sup>. This issue remains one of the most prevalent practices that oppress women not only in Pakistan but across the Muslim world, which deserves a separate extensive study. There are also cases in Pakistan where an accusation against a male member of the family leads to the sexual victimisation of the female of that family,

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<sup>25</sup> One of the most commonly practiced violence against women in Pakistan, which means the father or the other male guardian of the girl who is accused/guilty of adultery, (even raped) and thereby sullies the family honour, considers it his moral responsibility to kill the girl or, in most cases, both partners to redeem the family honour. This is commonly practiced across the Muslim world, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt and many other Muslim countries.



as compensation. In this regard one of the most important cases is of Mukhtar Mai<sup>26</sup>. A woman of Meerwala village in Punjab province, Mukhtar Mai was gang raped at the orders of the village panchayat<sup>27</sup> for honour revenge as Mukhtar's brother was accused of being involved with a girl of the opposite clan. (Mai and Cuny, 2006). Alyse Nelson (2012) in *Vital Voices: The Power of Women Leading Change Around the World* describes how shame and self-pity initially compelled Mukhtar Mai to think of committing suicide. However, Mukhtar's strong character and courage came to light as she decided to fight her victimisation by seeking legal help and media support to draw national and international attention to the injustice she had faced. This was a huge challenge, as Mai received threats and warnings (Nelson, 2012, p.140). Mai's courage allowed the world to witness an illiterate woman, who had never stepped out of her village, to emerge into an icon of resistance and courage. She not only challenged her oppressors but used the compensation money to build a school for girls in her village. This uneducated woman was aware that education can bring a positive change in a society on both individual and collective levels. This can prove helpful for women who suffer greater if they lack awareness and knowledge of their rights. Mai chooses to speak rather than keep silent in her oppression and suffering. Parallel to such real women who become icons of courage and resistance, fiction writers continue in their struggle to reflect such boldness through characters like Ahmad's Saba.

Saba is one such character that epitomises patience, suffering and resistance. Her ordeal is no doubt greater than her sin, which is later proved false, but Saba lives through her punishment with great strength and stamina. Her resilience becomes a defining characteristic of her personality that in turn raises her in our estimation. Though she silently agrees to the punishment of marrying a man much older than her, when her abusive husband throws her out of his house she refuses to bow down to suffering or self-pity. Arfeen's parents consider Saba's desire for higher education, in a co-education environment, as a threat to their traditional family values. Saba's approach clearly

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<sup>26</sup> Mukhtar Mai, also known as Mukhtaran Bibi was raped by at least four men as a punishment for her brother's misbehaviour.

<sup>27</sup> A village court, headed by the respectable village elders, usually in tribal and feudal areas but generally across Pakistani villages. It is a form of kacheri, where matters are decided in the open with an audience, the accused and the victim.

contradicts their view, as she believes in the importance of education for the moral, spiritual and psychological development of women. Sidhwa's Miriam in *The Pakistani Bride* also finds the idea of Zaitoon's education as shockingly strange. She fails to see the use of wasting the girl's time with cramming books when she could utilise her precious time to learn the art of housekeeping:

Miriam, scandalised by such a foolish waste of the girl's time, at last told Nikka, 'Now that she has learned to read the Holy Quran, what will she do with more reading and writing - boil and drink it? She is not going to become a baboo or an officer! No, Allah willing, she'll get married and have children. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.52)

Miriam further argues with Nikka against Zaitoon's education, "poor child...had she a mother she'd be learning to cook and sew... Does Qasim Bhai think he is rearing a boy? He ought to give some thought to her marriage...who'd want an educated bride?" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.53). Saba's uncle and aunt are of a similar view. They believe education is a man's affair and women should only acquire basic education. Saba presents as a young Muslim woman who questions these parameters that restrict women from higher education.

Saba's passion for education becomes her form of resistance against the rigid attitudes of her family members. She feels education can equip her to understand the society and the world she lives in. However, Saba realises that directly challenging the men of her family would be of little use so she decides to discuss her issue with Arfeen, as Arfeen had recently returned from the USA. As he comes to visit her family she inquires, "What is this thing called education?" Arfeen is taken aback by her question but replies that education is crucial and should be acquired. Saba then goes on to question him whether education is crucial for men only and Arfeen elaborates on the importance of education for both men and women. Saba then strategically moves to pin her next question, "So why is your father so against girls' education? He sends his own son to as far as the USA for higher education but will not allow me to step out of the house" (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.25). Arfeen inquires what she would do with a university degree and Saba poses his question back to him and he explains, "I am a man, I have to earn to support my family. I need higher education to be able to earn more" (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.

26). Saba argues that, “I intend to gain education, not necessarily to earn a living, but to gain awareness’. She looked serious. ‘And what would you do with that awareness? Arfeen inquired. ‘I will understand the world, understand the people” (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.26). As evident, Saba views education as more than a means of financial gains. She succeeds in getting permission to join a university, as Arfeen persuades his father.

Saba uses a similar logical discussion to challenge her uncle who insists that she must observe purdah by wearing a black burka if she is to join a university. Saba argues to use a chador (a form of scarf, enough to cover the head and upper body of a woman) instead of a traditional burkha:

I am joining the University to gain education, and I am aware of my self-respect and honour. I will not go unveiled, but take a chador. My head and body will remain covered, but I will not wear the traditional burka. Do you want to force the traditional burka on me so that, once I enter the university, I remove it and roam unveiled? Would that kind of veil help me or our family honour? (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.28)

Saba sets her own standards to define her identity as a Muslim woman. She does not refuse purdah entirely but certainly rejects the traditional and symbolic dress code. In other words, she discourages the symbolic association of a black burka set as a standard of purdah for Muslim women. Saba stresses on the moral development of Muslim women and, in a way, stresses that purdah of the mind is far more important than merely covering a woman’s body in a black cloth. Saba comes across with a different approach towards purdah as compared with Shahraz’s Zari Bano in *The Holy Woman* who feels comfortable with her choice of black burka. This indicates the diversity of attitudes towards dress codes used for purdah purposes which obviously also depend on the varying circumstances. Ahmad’s underlying message is to allow women to develop a clear conscience regarding all matters of life, especially female sexuality rather than imprisoning them within four walls and the confines of traditional dress codes.

She strives to encourage the patriarchal men of Pakistani Muslim society to realise that women should be treated with equal respect as human beings rather than dangerous,

suspicious, and alluring creatures whose sexuality is considered as a destructive force for the society. Moroccan Islamic feminist Fatima Mernissi is well known for her contribution to the studies centred on women's role in Islam in general and female sexuality in Islam specifically. She believes that the source of oppression for Muslim women lies not necessarily in the Quran but in the biased interpretations of certain teachings, specifically Ahadis (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace-be-upon-him) which ultimately led to the subordination of women in Islam. Mernissi (1991) in her book *The Veil and the Male Elite* elaborates on how the men with religious authority manipulated some of the Ahadis to fabricate false traditions and, "not only have the sacred texts always been manipulated, but manipulation of them is a structural characteristic of power in Muslim societies" (Mernissi, 1987, pp.8-9). Miriam Cooke (2001) in *Women Claim Islam* praises Mernissi's attempt to embark on a journey to, "question the unquestionable, namely the reliability of a 'sound' Tradition or saying attributed to the Prophet" (Cooke, 2001, p.71). Furthermore, Cooke acknowledges the efforts made by other Muslim women such as Djebbar and El Saadawi, who along with Mernissi have played a great role towards, "deconstruct[ing] the discourse that have served to construct norms that exclude them as women" (Cooke, 2001, p.80). Similarly, Farida Shaheed (1991), as discussed in the introduction chapter, explains how male interpretation of Islam has been used to justify patriarchal attitudes. She stresses how this has caused contemporary Pakistani women to reluctantly accept an unequal and unjust position in society (Shaheed, 1991, p.135). For example, education for women in Pakistani society is channelled according to the ideology of purdah. Shaheed explains how women's entry into medicine and teaching is again to maintain the ideology of purdah, "that female clientele be served by women" (Shaheed, 1991, p.148). Purdah has been used to channel and, in some ways, restrict women from education or to certain fields of education.

Sarah Graham-Brown (1988) in her book *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* refers to a young Egyptian woman, Doraya Shafiq who, as far back as 1928, through her following speech summarises the spatial segregation of women through purdah and its detrimental effects on their intellectual development:

You build walls around your daughters and surround them with ever more doors and guards. Have you forgotten, then, that walls can never be high enough to counter feminine guile? Your daughters will always have some servant or old woman to help them communicate with the outside world. You show them the world through the framework of their imagination, so that all they see of it is illusion and, at the first opportunity they fall into the abyss. The more you restrict them the stronger will be their reaction. Give your daughters a clear conscience and let them out into the world: their sense of duty will stand them in good stead when the sturdiest of walls would crumble. (Cited in Graham-Brown, 1988, p.85)

Ahmad similarly stresses on the moral and intellectual development of women which can prove to be a better safeguard for them. Ananthram (2009) regarding her analysis of a Pakistani female poet Kishwar Naheed's poem 'Anticlockwise' similarly asserts:

Every fetter he throws in her way, she subverts into an act of power; even if she may not be able to see, smell or walk, he cannot control her mind and her thoughts. Despite his repeated attempts to control her senses, he has no control over who she is - he can control her body but not her mind. (Ananthram, 2009, p.211)

This poem exposes and criticises an obsession and fascination with female bodies in Pakistan at national level which in turn has grave consequences on the daily lives of women at domestic level. It also highlights a sense of resistance towards this male-preoccupation with female bodies. As Saba rejects a traditional burka, she also rejects the traditional mentality associated with purdah. The mentality used by patriarchy to shroud and confine women within four walls, as Shaheed explains, "to control their access to information. Restricted to their homes or villages and barred from market places and educational institutions women have little access to information concerning the dynamics of economics, or politics" (Shaheed, 1991, p.148). Clearly, such measures are to strengthen male control over women.

Ahmad also points out the rigid perpetuation of certain misogynistic values deep into the fibre of Pakistani society which makes it very challenging for women to resist. As in Saba's case, though granted permission for higher studies, she is ostracised from her uncle's family who begin to avoid and dislike her. Their hatred for Saba becomes worse

as Arfeen, impressed by Saba's ambitiousness, decides to marry her. After a lot of arguments with his parents he succeeds in convincing them. Arfeen is deeply impressed by Saba's letters that they exchange, as Arfeen after marrying Saba moves to France for two years, "There was a constant exchange of letters between the two, but they were not of any traditional sort of love letters. Instead, they contained everything apart from expressions of love and romance" (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.28). Saba's letters defy the traditional love letters placing Saba above an average romantic young woman showing her to be an intellectual woman instead. With regards to her writings, Arfeen expresses:

Saba's letters always seemed like a book to Arfeen. Every word carried new meanings, new connotations. As he read her letters, some sentences would amaze him, some stunned him and still others would take his breath away. A second reading of the same letter never failed to reveal secrets of a new world. (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.29)

Saba emerges as a strong character through her written and spoken ability. As patriarchal society seldom tolerates such boldness in women, Saba is also caught in a situation where her language and speech fails to support her. As her mother-in-law gathers the whole family and accuses Saba of adultery, no one is willing to listen or believe her. On the other hand, the vehement cries of her mother-in-law, accompanied by a string of abuses are given more attention:

'You wanton, witch, liar of a woman. Why would I send you to this room? You shameless, brazen woman! How dare you carry out your evil act in my son's room!? How could we even think of taking such a woman as our daughter-in-law?' Her aunt kept beating her breasts. (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.52)

Both Saba and Aadil make humble attempts to explain but in vain. Aadil loses his temper and cursing his aunt flees from the situation, whereas Saba remains rooted in the space, unable to move. Just as Naghmana experiences a greater ordeal of physical and verbal abuse as compared to Haroon, Saba too faces physical and emotional violence whereas Aadil easily flees from the situation. Both the female figures further undergo bodily torture, as Saba's uncle drags her by her hair:

Children watched excitedly in the courtyard, as uncle dragged her by her hair and pushed her to the ground. Then he took his shoes off and let loose a string of beatings on her head. Saba tried to get hold of his hand. This only aggravated him. 'No uncle! Please stop! Don't hit me like this, not here in front of all the people. If you want to kill me just shoot me' uncle continued and Saba raised her head for a last time to look at the people watching her. (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.55)

To be beaten by a shoe is the mark of shame and degradation. Saba strives to save herself from public humiliation and shame but, like Naghmana in *Typhoon*, her uncle makes sure that her shame is brought before a public audience. Both Shahrzad and Ahmad paint similar pictures of punishments given to women for perceived or alleged immoral behaviour, where even supposed infidelity carries serious consequences. Though Saba, unlike Naghmana, grabs every opportunity to explain and plead her innocence, both of the female figures experience a similar sense of shame and public exposure. Both Naghmana and Saba attempt to hide themselves behind barriers to escape the intense gaze of people around them. Whereas Naghmana, "let her aunt's muslin shawl slide further down over her face to shield her from hostile gazes" (*Typhoon*, p.158) Saba also faces severe public exposure as the guests of the wedding gathered around her to watch:

Saba leaned against the wall. The crowd had surrounded her in a circle. She could not run away like Aadil, and neither did she desire to. She could not understand what was happening. The only thing that made sense to her were the people around her and their direct gazes piercing through her body like daggers... She could not stand any longer so she sat on the floor, hiding her face in her lap. She suddenly realised why pigeons liked to close their eyes in the face of danger. (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.53)

Both Saba and Naghmana are rendered vulnerable before an audience which brings their shame to life and consequently the female figures cower before it as shame like a cover shrouds their whole existence robbing them of dignity, respect and voice.

Further, shame is not only enacted and conveyed through the body language, gestures and stares of the people but is voiced and verbally laden upon the female figures through abuses and rejection. Saba faces a similar rejection and abuse from her mother as

Naghmana faces from her aunt. Both fallen women are told to drown themselves and die. As Saba makes her way back home after the incident her mother in rage and anguish asks, “What have you come here for, after brazenly blackening your face? You shameless woman! Go and drown yourself to death. Saba you have proved to be a poisonous snake for my family. Why didn’t I strangle you to death when you were born?”<sup>28</sup> (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.62). Both, Naghmana and Saba, are scolded and abused without being given any chance to explain. However, Saba, unlike Naghmana, does not allow her voice to desert her. On the contrary, she chooses to boldly live through her ordeal as she speaks to her mother, “I have not shamed myself mother. You have all joined together to shame me. I have received my share of disgrace. Now it is your turn, this family and every person who has unjustly accused me” (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.63). Saba retains her confidence and stands firm in her position refusing to bow down to family pressure, thereby turning her place of slaughter into a battle field.

Her determination however suffers as Arfeen fails to trust Saba’s word against his mother’s. Saba reaches out to him in desperation begging him to believe and trust her, but all the evidence speaks against her. Ahmad highlights how difficult it becomes for women to prove matters related to their sexuality and how women often suffer due to lack of evidence. An even deeper message that Ahmad aims to deliver concerns the lack of trust placed in the voice of women. Ironically the very Arfeen who sings praises of Saba’s impressive letters and intellectual ability refuses to believe her word.

There emerges an important relationship between women, language and silence. Whereas the women in *The Holy Woman* including Zari Bano choose the easier option of remaining silent, Saba on the other hand decides to speak out and use the power of language to defend herself. Ironically Saba’s words and speech, otherwise considered inspiring and filled with meaning by Arfeen, fail to satisfy his male ego on this occasion. Her words become meaningless, hollow cries unable to exert any convincing effect on her husband, as Arfeen exclaims, “don’t give me your philosophy today Saba, talk to me in a language that I can understand...that can convince me of your innocence” (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.64). Ahmad, like Shahrzad through Zari Bano’s situation, clearly raises

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<sup>28</sup> The mother refers to the practice of killing female babies at birth practiced during the pre-Islamic times.



certain questions regarding the place that women's voice is allowed in Pakistani society where the male ears, not accustomed to hearing the female voice raised in self-defence, refuse to lend credibility to it.

Ghulam Murtiza and Abdul Baseer (2011) speaking in the context of language and women in Pakistani society assert that, "language as a metaphor of power which becomes a metaphor of powerlessness for women" (Murtiza and Baseer, 2011, p.559). Similarly, for Saba her apparent ability and command over language that she uses to debate with her family members fails to offer her authority over her sexuality. Saba's attempt to emerge as an intellectual, and not preoccupied and obsessed with her body, but a 'woman with mind' is unwelcomed and crushed by the society, as Murtiza and Baseer continue to explain that, "Pakistani society cannot afford similarity between men and women because it wants to see a man as more than a man and a woman less than a woman. Any breach in this hierarchy of existence is profane" (Murtiza and Baseer, 2011, p.559). Ahmad points to a similar helplessness regarding the little credibility a woman is allowed in a male dominated society. Like Zari Bano, Saba's voice is not only repressed but her sexuality is also repressed by marrying her to a much older and illiterate widower.

Saba's attempt to emerge as more than a woman through knowledge and intellect is severely punished by silencing her verbally and sexually. This clearly reflects a social hostility and social rejection of a woman's desire for knowledge and expression of knowledge. Thus, a woman's access to knowledge and expression is restricted, channelled and closely monitored in a patriarchal society. As discussed in the previous chapter, sexual knowledge is specifically repressed and channelled in Pakistani society. For example, Sidhwa's Zaitoon is rebuked by Miriam as she tries to snuggle up to Miriam and rocks her hips. Though Zaitoon is unaware of the implications of her gesture, Miriam clearly sees this behaviour as expression of sexual knowledge and desire. Similar examples abound in other Muslim cultures where expression of sexual knowledge specifically by young girls can be severely punished. Naomi Nkealah (2009) examines the different means through which silence is imposed specifically on female sexuality and explains how any expression of sexual knowledge and desire through any means,

language, gesture or behaviour, especially by young women, is criticised and even punished.

One particular story centres on an Egyptian woman, Bahiyya, who learns of the process of procreation by observing animals such as cats and dogs, noting the similarities in the ways of their mating, and bit by bit she is able to understand how the same thing happens between men and women (Nkealah, 2009, p.33). Her venture into the territory of forbidden knowledge is punished by a group of women who grab her one day, at the age of nine, and excise her clitoris with a razor blade. This incident symbolically reflects the silencing of female sexuality as it takes place shortly after Bahiyya makes clay dolls, “putting between the legs of her father something like that of a cats’ tail and giving her mother something like a sort of a mulberry” (Nkealah, 2009, p.34). The excision of Bahiyya’s clitoris is thus a form of rebuking where an excess had to be removed from Bahiyya’s body to compensate her expression of knowledge. It seems that by expressing her knowledge of female sexuality, Bahiyya makes a claim of possessing something extra that had to be removed, in Bahiyya’s own words, “They left me with a wound in my body and another wound deep inside me, a feeling that a wrong has been done to me, a wrong that can never be undone” (Nkealah, 2009, p.34). Rebuked at their innocent expressions and pleasures, women like Bahiyya and Zaitoon’s lives are defined by unexplained silences and confusions where things suddenly happen to them.

Saba’s desire for higher education is seen as her stubbornness and rejection of family traditions. Her entry into a co-education university to study in a close company of men is seen as her loose morality. This explains why her uncle is unwilling to believe Saba’s plea of innocence. As her aunt taunts at Saba’s mother, “see, Aliya what your daughter has done. I warned you, I told you to tame her. But you never listened. Now you’ll have to hide your face in shame for the rest of your life” (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.34). As evident, Saba’s determination, her strong-willed personality is associated with uncontrolled female sexuality. Thus, women’s desire for knowledge is often associated with a desire to assert control over sexuality. An educated woman will want to choose her own husband, will easily refuse an arranged marriage and also, as is assumed in Saba’s case, will have no qualms about pre-marital or extra-marital sex. Thus female

sexuality remains a point of contention that needs to be controlled by restricting women from all those activities that associate with assertion of agency, free-will, independent thinking and expression of sexual desire.

As discussed in the previous chapters, female sexuality is controlled and exploited through religiously validated social norms and values to silence women into subordination. Shahraz's Zari Bano, along with other female members of her family, in *The Holy Woman* and Naghmana in *Typhoon* are forced into silence. Whether it is to avoid upheaval in the feudal family traditions, as Zari Bano expresses, or emotional blackmail, as Naghmana faces from Siraj Din, or the fear of social rejection and disgrace due to which Kaneez keeps quiet about her rape, these women face innumerable hurdles that are deemed impossible to surpass. Ahmad's Saba, on the other hand, chooses silence as a way of resistance. It may be argued that Saba's silence is a result of her rejection that she faces from her family members and especially her husband Arfeen for whom her verbal testimony was not enough to prove her innocence. However, Saba's silence both verbal (as she chooses not to speak to anyone about it, not even her daughter Sara) and physical (as she leaves her family and breaks all connections with them) reflects her determination and courage. In other words, as the various men in her life refuse to listen to her or believe her she accepts her divorce and takes her own course in life.

Saba's situation finds a startling resemblance with Shahraz's Zari Bano and Naghmana. All three women belong to well-off families, are educated and are caught in a conflicting situation regarding their sexuality. However what differentiates Saba is her constant resistance. Whereas Zari Bano and Naghmana are easily silenced, Saba does not give into social pressure. She not only physically tries to restrain her uncle from beating her as she tries to hold his hand, but she keeps insisting that he should not make a spectacle of her by beating her in public. Furthermore, Saba feels shamed as all the wedding guests watch her being beaten by her uncle but, unlike Naghmana and Zari Bano, she refuses to accept her shame. In spite of her mother's repeated wailing of bringing shame onto them, she boldly challenges her instead, "I have not shamed myself. I have been shamed by you all. You all joined together to shame me" (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.39). Thus, Saba's refusal to show self-pity and shame becomes her way of resistance. Rather than

suffering in any sort of self-pity, she feels angry at her mother and her family for not believing her, for letting her down. She refuses to keep any contacts with her family and thereby uses her silence to show her resistance. Years later, after her aunt confesses of her plotting against Saba, Arfeen, after much struggle, locates her and begs his forgiveness, “Please! Say something Saba, scream at me, yell at me, tell me to go away. Curse us all, curse us all to rot in hell. Tell me you hate me... Please Saba! Beat me like my father beat you’. He cried and wailed in anguish and Saba watched him silently” (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.62). Saba’s silence and her refusal to speak to Arfeen becomes her means of resistance. Saba makes her own decisions about her speech and silence and it is precisely through this choice that Saba is able to use both her voice and silence as a means of resistance and power. Unlike Zari Bano who silently plays along in her father’s scheme, and her mother who claims that serving her husband in all his decisions is her duty, Saba refuses to bow to submission.

So Shahraz, in a way, limits her character’s possibilities of resistance. For example, had Zari Bano’s mother refused to obey her husband she could have been divorced and rendered homeless, therefore both Zari Bano and her mother reason their meek capitulation to powerful patriarchal structures and silently surrender their lives to their men. They are fully aware of the possible repercussions of their resistance and therefore compromise their subordination to avoid any upheaval in their lives. Shahraz further rewards her female characters for this obedient compromise, guised by piety and virtues of Muslim women, by gradually allowing them to regain their lost positions. Their submission, goodness and piety are rewarded in the end as the patriarchal male order suffers a gradual dissolution triggered by an unseen force and cosmic intervention in the form of disease or death. Thus, her patient and ideal women are rewarded for their virtue as they regain happiness. Zari Bano’s mother regains her respect and position in her home as Habib, before he sets off on the Holy pilgrimage, begs his forgiveness by touching her feet. Similarly, Zari Bano is also rewarded as her father allows her marry.

Ahmad, on the other hand, does not compromise on the self-esteem of her female characters. She allows Saba to speak so that her verbal repression could not become a source of guilt for her. She allows her to defend herself but at the same time Ahmad

renders her narrative a realistic touch by clearly showing the retaliation given to women who are considered sexually and verbally transgressive of societal boundaries. Just like Sidhwa's Zaitoon who transgresses the boundaries of her husband's home and is punished by rape, Saba too is denied the boundaries of her home and punished by forced marriage. Thus it becomes evident that women in patriarchal societies are not only punished for running away from their homes but are also punished by being forced to leave their parents' or their husband's home in case of any offence. Lenny's second Nanny in *Ice Candy Man* is denied her husband's home as a punishment for being raped, just like Zaitoon and the unknown Bride in *The Pakistani Bride* were punished for leaving their husband's houses. So home for a woman becomes a 'site' which determines her social status and security; it becomes a medal offered as a prized possession, as a favour along with its domestic duties of day and night, and at the same time the woman stands at risk of losing this possession as a punishment for any wrong deed. In other words, a woman in Pakistani society passes from her father's house to her husband's house which will later become her son's house and therefore always remains in an insecure position of not fully belonging to any of these places. Unlike men, women are always at a greater threat of being disowned, thrown out of these places ruled by their men.

Shaheed (1991) presents a detailed argument on this conscious patriarchal manipulation which results in the economic deprivation and vulnerability of women in Pakistani society. She explains how the concept of *Haq-mehr*<sup>29</sup> in Islam, which is designed to ensure a certain measure of security to women, has been manipulated through practices such as bride-price<sup>30</sup> and dowry<sup>31</sup>. (Shaheed, 1991, p.140). This obviously means that a woman became a commodity to be sold in marriage through bride-price and dowry became a strategy to justify a woman's lack of share in her father's property. Ahmad stresses on this crucial need for Muslim women to be aware of patriarchal manipulation of their religious rights. Through Saba's predicaments she highlights the vulnerability of women as Saba is thrown out of her father's house and later her husband's house.

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<sup>29</sup> Haq-mehr is an Islamic practice according to which the groom has to give a certain amount of money to the bride. Haq-mehr is mutually decided by both families at the time of the marriage ceremony. Haq-mehr can also include gold or transferring any property onto the bride's name.

<sup>30</sup> Bride-price is a social custom of paying a certain amount of money by the groom to the bride's father in order to marry his daughter.

<sup>31</sup> Dowry is a social custom by which a bride's parents provide money, goods and gold for her. She takes all these material goods called dowry into her in-laws house. This is commonly practiced in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

However as Sara marries Arfeen's son she stresses on her Haq-mehr. Sara's aunt suggests that Arfeen's house be legally transferred in Sara's name as a part of Haq-mehr. Ahmad encourages women to be more assertive towards their religiously accorded rights regarding inheritance. As Shaheed notes:

Pakistani women are thus caught in a vicious cycle: to guard against the eventuality of divorce, separation or widowhood, women may forgo their share of inheritance to please their brother in case the future finds them dependent on their male siblings. Similarly, to appease their in-laws women may choose to forgo their Haq-mehr. Neither practice provides any real measure of protection and both militate against economic independence. (Shaheed, 1991, p.141)

Sara enters the narrative at the age of nineteen. She is initially confused and is unaware of her mother's past life. Whereas Saba chooses a life of self-negation and exile, hiding her identity and her bitter past from not only her daughter but from the people around her, Sara, on the other hand, is eager to re-locate her extended family. Saba's silence, regarding her previous life, creates a lack of communication between herself and her daughter. Sara wished her mother would let down the guard of silence, "She wanted her mother to talk to her. To break the wall of silence she had built around herself; a barrier that had never let them get close to each other" (*Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*, p.6). In other words, both mother and the daughter are caught in a struggle; Saba's struggle to escape from her memories runs parallel to Sara's struggle to unravel her past. Further, Sara always interprets her mother's silence as perhaps hiding her guilt which Sara associates with her mother's supposed elopement with her father due to which her family disowned her. Ahmad points out how easy it is for a woman's character to be suspected if she lives independently with no family around her. Sara grows up with certain suspicions, and grudges towards her mother which make her mother's character evermore mysterious for her.

It is only when Sara eventually learns of her mother's predicament, as she lives with Arfeen and visits her mother's old family house that she realises that her mother's ordeal, which she carried as a life sentence, was inflicted by her family members. She not only begins to hate her newly discovered family but runs away from Arfeen's house and

refuses to marry his son, to whom she is engaged. A similar resilience and strength of character is witnessed in Saba's daughter as she takes accommodation in a girl's hostel and pursues a job to fend for herself. Sara's endeavour to live independently like her mother proves a journey rife with difficulties. After a long struggle Arfeen and his son succeed in locating Sara and manage to persuade her to return. Ahmad's Saba upholds her self-respect and strives in a life of alienation and struggle in a society that treats her harshly. Ahmad's Sara is sensible enough to forgive the guilty family members and reconciles in the hope of a happy future. In other words, Ahmad advocates resistance towards the injustice that women commonly suffer, as Saba refuses to reconcile with her family, thereby declining the safe confines of her parent's 'home' where she was shamed and accused. On the other hand, Ahmad is cautious and points out the challenges women may encounter in cases where either they choose to abandon or are abandoned by their families. Here Ahmad discourages unnecessary resistance and promotes safe confines of the home as the best place for women, however, not at the cost of self-respect.

The novel ends with Sara amicably forgiving Arfeen and the rest of the family for the injustice done to her mother. She decides to marry Arfeen's son due to her own will and begins her journey to what appears to be a promising future. She manages to resolve the mystery behind her mother's silence and chooses to break that silence by forgiving her relatives. Sara's journey that began in vague confusion ends in certainty defined by self-respect and contentment. Ahmad's novel therefore captures the intertwined struggle of a mother and daughter, Saba and Sara. However, what remains striking throughout the novel is Saba's resistance and determination. She presents a woman who not only desires an improvement in women's position in Pakistani society but struggles and, in many ways, succeeds in creating her identity as an independent woman who is unwilling to compromise with patriarchal injustice. Saba challenges her victimisation through her determination and resistance.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the various female characters, across the novels, reveals a male obsession and fascination with female body and sexuality. The sexual awakening, victimisation and emotional suppression of female sexuality highlight how women's bodies are effectively controlled and exploited through cultural traditions and the manipulation of religious rules regarding the position of men and women in society. Consequently, the female body becomes a battle-ground upon which men fight their wars to uphold national and international agendas and nurture their sense of superiority. The female figure is thus thrown into an emotional battle to fulfil the male-oriented culturally constructed duties, guised as modesty and obedience, and an inner urge to rebel and pursue her own desire. This desire can simply be to choose a marriage partner, to attain education or to be simply loved and respected as equal individuals.

This research provides some insight into how the identity of a Pakistani woman is shaped and influenced by disparate socio-economic and cultural factors. Sidhwa, Shahrzad and Ahmad encourage their readers to recognise and acknowledge both the similarities and the differences that define Pakistani women within their domestic and public spheres. This study has endeavoured to capture the image of a female figure in Pakistani society, which is defined by disparate but, as presented through the female characters, always patriarchal and often conflicting ideologies that governs her life. Tahira Khan (2006) asserts:

While analysing women's situation in Pakistan, it needs to be remembered that despite cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, the patterns of agriculture-based tribal, feudal, clan systems and kinship networks are strikingly similar. Consequently, familial relationships and women's status, and roles in the family are also not very different in all the four provinces. (Khan, 2006, p.145)

My analysis of the various female characters in the novels also confirms and presents a similar pattern of oppression that takes its course through a control over female body. It



is this diverse portrayal of women, yet marked by similar debilitating structures that combine Sidhwa, Shahrzad and Ahmad in a unity of purpose.

Pakistani female fiction writers offer an exploration of this systematic oppression of Pakistani women that occurs regardless of their class, caste, region and language that brings them under the common umbrella of victimisation. Nadejda Sadig Al-Ali (1994) in her book *Gender Writing/Writing Gender: The Representation of Women in a Selection of Modern Egyptian Literature* talks of the comprehensive research she carried out to understand the concept of Arab female identity through various sources such as novels, short stories etc. She explains how, “Even within the boundaries of one nation, women’s experiences and identities vary greatly. Class, place of residence (urban/rural), religious affiliation, family and individual character account for heterogeneity” (Sadig Al-Ali, 1994, p.4). However, as she pondered over the possible commonalities that bind women within their differing contexts, one of the more striking realisations, in her words was, “being engendered, being subjected to patriarchal structures oppressing women constitutes a unifying element even beyond the boundary of a culture or a society” (Sadig Al-Ali, 1994, p.4).

One cannot naively universalise women’s oppression but the overlapping structures of punishment, shame and honour codes regarding female sexuality across Pakistan is evident in the works of Sidhwa, Shahrzad and Ahmad. Thus it becomes impossible to ignore the similar treatment, degradation and victimisation that women suffer. This victimisation can be physical where female bodies are sold and exchanged, beaten and raped, as Sidhwa’s work highlights, or emotional, as Shahrzad shows, where religion and cultural traditions are fused to exploit and victimise women or, as Ahmad highlights, to suppress women’s intellectual growth and development. Thus, regardless of the nature or the reason behind victimisation, we see a clear self-negation of the female figures which leaves them in a conflicting situation and a constant perusal of their identity. In the words of Uzma Aslam Khan (2009):

In Pakistan, this on-going battle involves her sexuality, marriage, mobility, work, dress - so much about which is heard rarely from herself.

Local religious zealots control her in the name of Islam; the west controls her in the name of freedom. She is never consulted: Why should she be, when she has no intellect, no artistry? She does not belong to herself but to others. (Khan, 2009, p.2)

Through issues such as marriage, childlessness, rape, adultery, the struggle for education and divorce, these writers explore how their female figures struggle to construct and define their social standing and identity. The novels discussed throughout this study present women displaying all sorts of abilities and courage in the face of the most oppressive of circumstances. For example, Sidhwa's Zaitoon in *The Pakistani Bride* displays the most courageous and life risking act of running away from her husband's tribe in the mountains. However, we also come across women preoccupied with emotional conflicts unable to bring any change to their circumstances, for example, Shahraz's Zari Bano and her mother remain helpless against the decision taken by Habib. Sidhwa, Shahraz and Ahmad through their narratives not only remain an important agent in exposing the oppressive situations that women of present day Pakistan encounter through the most obvious and the most subtle means but also provide possible answers and suggestions for women suffering through similar situations.

Sidhwa Shahraz and Ahmad, though united in their purpose to better the situation of women, differ in their approaches towards possible resistance as shown by the trajectories of their characters. For example, Sidhwa remains critical of loveless marriages and allows her characters the liberty of walking out of their oppressive marriages as in the case of Ayah who leaves her husband Ice Candy Man and Zaitoon who runs away from her husband Sakhi. Shahraz, on the other hand, advocates and promotes the legal boundaries of marriage as the only safe confines within which the Pakistani women can exist. Ahmad's analysis of a woman's position in the patriarchal society remains most important and thought provoking. She displays a social hostility towards women who attempt to defy their traditionally endorsed image of passivity. Ahmad's writing exposes how women's attempt to assert agency and independent thinking is considered synonymous to a desire to control their sexuality. This can lead to social ostracism and women in such situations experience alienation. Thus Ahmad cautions that a struggle against the patriarchal structures is rife with opposition, criticism and

harshness. Nevertheless, through her character's determination she advocates and urges for the necessary struggle for the betterment of women in Pakistani society.

As already mentioned female sexuality remains the major focus of these writers which comes across as the most exploited terrain regarding women. In fact, the different ways through which female sexuality is negotiated, exploited and treated and the range of reactions put forward by women (within their circumstances) brings out both the common suffering of these women as well as the different levels of agency and autonomy displayed by them. For most of the female characters sexuality remains inter-related with marriage, therefore female sexuality and marriage remain the intersecting themes explored throughout the novels. In Sidhwa's words, "marriages were the high points in the life of the women" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.88). Marriage occupies the minds of women like no other issue, and all the writers, discussed in this study, provide a unique but important point of view towards it. Lenny in *Ice Candy Man* worries about getting married due to her dark skin colour and limping leg. Her mother works hard to keep her married life going and Ayah goes through a disastrous forced marriage to her abductor. Similarly, Papoo is forcefully married to a middle aged dwarf by her mother. Sidhwa does not entirely highlight marriage as a power struggle where women remain victims, as through the character of Godmother, a dominating house-wife, and her unmarried sister Slavester, Sidhwa shows how Godmother exercises her influence in her network of friends and over her unmarried sister who is dependent on Godmother. Sidhwa points out that being unmarried and thereby dependent can also be a cause of misery and oppression as much as in the case of an unwanted or forced marriage. In other words, marriage is not always the conflicting confines from which the female figure has to break free to attain agency or authority. It can provide a certain level of authority and freedom to South Asian women.

Sidhwa explores the issues of marriage in greater detail as the title of her novel *The Pakistani Bride* reveals a great deal about the possible subject matter of the novel. The novel opens with a bride Afshan and traces the journey of many other brides across the novel including Zaitoon and Carol which remain the central focus of the novel, and brides who briefly enter the narrative like the Mullah's step-daughter, Nusrat:

Zaitoon sat with Nusrat, sharing her desolation at leaving her family. For a whole week the bride sits, her body and hair greasy with oil massages, in old clothes; the better to bloom, bathed and perfumed, swathed in red silks, hair, throat and arms aglow with jewels, on the day of the marriage. (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.90)

Nusrat does not make a significant contribution to the plot and leaves the narrative with her groom. However, her marriage sets Zaitoon's marriage in motion as Zaitoon soon after Nusrat sets off to her husband's tribe as a bride to be wedded. Zaitoon's journey as a bride in her husband's territory runs parallel to Carol's experience with her husband. The novel ends with both of the brides, Zaitoon and Carol refusing to bow to their expected roles of submissive brides. However, we also come across the floating head of a bride in a river which indicates the harsh consequences for brides who dare to challenge their roles as submissive wives.

Sidhwa explores how female sexuality, especially through marriage, is controlled amongst the tribes of Pakistan. She also points out the physical, psychological and emotional punishments women are subjected to as a routine part of daily lives. These punishments are often given on the pretext of offences, insults and even imagined infidelities. Thus women's bodies become disputed territories and men across Pakistan lay their claim over these bodies in their own ways. Women can be subjected to a range of physical violence as the Major in *The Pakistani Bride* informs Carol, "It happens all the time. Women get killed for one reason or the other...imagined insults, family honour, infidelity...Chopping off women's noses in the Punjab and here they just kill the girl" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.223). As pointed out by the Army Major, punishments given to women may vary according to the differing geographical locations within the same country depending on the emphasis given to female sexuality in its association with honour. In Punjab cutting off the nose might be enough to assuage the harm brought by a woman but, as evident, in the tribal area of Kohistan, only murdering the women washes away the shame brought onto the family.

Shahraz's novels show a marked preference for arranged marriages. Zari Bano seems to have a voice in deciding her prospective groom but ironically as she falls in love with Sikandar her father refuses Sikandar. This again indicates a conscious repression of female sexuality as romantic association of a woman with a man before marriage is considered potentially destructive. Tahira Khan (2006) in her chapter 'Love Transgresses Boundaries' asserts:

In the context of Pakistan romantic love gives women the power to break the shackles of patriarchal traditions such as forced or exchanged marriages, intra-family, and intra-faith marriages, etc. Once a woman falls in love with a man, irrespective of class, caste, creed, or ethnicity, she is determined to take a stand against all patriarchal institutions, religious, cultural, economic or political. (Khan, 2006, p.192)

The underlying cause for Habib's dislike towards Sikandar seems to be a feeling of rivalry and jealousy as Habib is unable to handle the feelings Sikandar has aroused in his daughter. Further, Younis Raees, though he desires to marry Kaneez, channels his marriage proposal through Siraj Din, the village elder rather than directly approaching Kaneez. He later visits her at her home but only as a last resort to persuade her. In fact, arranging a marriage is so crucial that Kalsoom takes on marriage arranging as a profession and earns her living from it. Her services are always in high demand and she finds all sorts of gathering be it weddings or funerals as ideal opportunities to arrange matches. Jaffar's funeral and later Zari Bano's wedding to the Quran and Habib's and Ruby's tragic deaths benefited her profession as women from far and wide gathered to celebrate or mourn and therefore actively sought suitable matches for their children of marriageable age.

Whereas arranged marriages are celebrated and are considered a matter of pride, love marriages, on the other hand, are frowned upon. Naghmana's love marriage with Haroon is frowned upon by the village people and Siraj Din's impulsive decision to pressurise Haroon to divorce Naghmana reflects his disapproval of their romantic association and love marriage. As Siraj Din succeeds in getting Naghmana divorced he addresses Gulshan, "ultimately you were destined to be the winner...the scales were weighed against her from the very beginning...you now have your husband and your world back (Typhoon,

p.177). Evidently, the patriarchal scales were weighed against the expression of female sexuality and desire. Most of the marriages in Shahraz's novels highlight the stress laid on the arrangement of marriage in Pakistani society. There is no doubt an underlying element of security and stability in arranged marriages which are socially sanctioned through families. But as discussed before, marriage is mostly used as a way to assert patriarchal control over women and a woman's wish to marry by choice is often seen as immodesty, and a desire to control her sexuality. Shahraz's aim in both of her novels remains to promote marriage. Her unmarried female characters eventually gain happiness through marriage and her unhappy married women make efforts to blow life into their dead marriages as Gulshan after many years makes an effort to communicate with her emotionally distant husband. Interestingly Shahraz's unmarried women remain lonely and depressed. In other words Shahraz unlike Sidhwa keenly promotes marriage as the only safe confine for women sexually, financially and emotionally.

Similarly, Saba and Arfeen's romantic association and desire to marry in *Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan* is strongly opposed by Arfeen's parents. Ahmad shows how romantic affiliation of young people causes social anxiety and hostility. Recent Pakistani dramas, (*Ahmad Habib ki betiyan*, *Hamsafar*) screen plays and popular magazines highlight the social stigma associated with love marriage. In *Ahmad Habib Ki Betiyan* (Ahmad Habib's daughters) the main protagonist secretly marries her lover to avoid forced marriage and is later abused by her mother-in-law who accuses her of being a fallen woman. A common thread that runs through the portrayal of marriage by the three authors discussed is a conscious suppression of romantic love.

Ayah's romantic association with Masseur is similarly met with harshness. Her fascination with the traditional tales of love couples of Punjabi folklore such as Heer-Ranjha, Laila-Majnoon, Sohni-Mahiwal and Sasi-Punou reflects her rejection of the patriarchal grip over her body as she wishes to marry her lover Masseur. Unfortunately, Ayah like these love-couples mentioned, faces tragedy at the hands of uncompromising society. As all these love couples were men and women belonging to different cultural and linguistic groups who met each other and fell in love. But their romantic association was seen as destructive to the boundaries of class, race and ethnic ties and thus each couple

suffered at the hands of their own family members through death and forced marriage (Khan, 2006, p.198). Ayah and Masseur also belong to different religions and therefore, their romantic association is socially disapproved. Ayah sees herself as the historical figure of Sohni and Masseur as the Mahiwal. However, Ayah's predicament too tears away her innocent joys, her pleasures and pride as Ice Candy Man uses the partition riots to punish the couple. He murders Masseur and sells Ayah's body for prostitution and later marries her to maintain his unquestionable control over her body. His decision to marry her, though apparently born out of love and repentance, is clearly to establish his proprietorship over Ayah's body as a husband. Ayah is painfully awakened to the brutality of Ice Candy Man as he transforms into a human being capable of violence and unexplained atrocities.

Further, as we move onto Sidhwa's second novel *The Pakistani Bride*, we see a similar pattern of repression of female sexuality. Zaitoon like Ayah also fantasises of her romantic lover, in the mystical mountains that Qasim describes to her. However what Zaitoon's innocent mind is unable to fathom is that Qasim shows Zaitoon his tribal world from the eyes of a man, of how he has been brought up in the mountains, cared for and nurtured, free to explore the mysteries of the mountains around him, unrestricted by the domestic chores and rigorous guarding by male eyes. Zaitoon, on the other hand, as she journeys to the world described by Qasim soon realises the one-sided picture she had been imagining. As Ayah learns of the brutality that Ice Candy Man is capable of, the man who showered his love and favours on her, Zaitoon too sees the violent side of her father as she insists on returning to the plains and refuses to marry Sakhi after spending only a day in Qasim's home-land. Qasim's fury is revealed as soon as Zaitoon refuses to act along in Qasim's scheme, "Qasim was furious. He wrenched at her slender, clinging fingers and pushed her away. 'Now understand this'...Qasim's tone was icily incisive. 'I've given my word, on it depends my honour. It is dearer to me than life. If you besmirch it, I will kill you with my bare hands'" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.159). Zaitoon witnesses her loving father turn into an honour-crazy tribal for whom his daughter becomes nothing more than tradable commodity, the value of his words to his clan. Zaitoon is not only exposed to her father's dark side. In addition to this her romantic vision of the mysterious land is further shattered as Sakhi fails to measure up to Zaitoon's expected

hero as he not only suspects her movements but beats her to claim his male superiority and control over her body.

The other main figure of Sidhwa's novel, Carol, finds her journey into her husband's country a similar experience of sexual exploitation, degradation and repression for women to which she was no exception. She discovers that beneath the surface of apparent mannerism, modernism and the over-protectiveness displayed by the Major who in one incident reveals to Carol that, "'Do you know,' he continued, 'this morning I had to post a picket to guard you while you painted the river?' Unexpectedly she glowed with excitement...This was it! A sense of being catered to and protected'" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.113). Carol not only innocently idealises the Major but considers all the Pakistani men, including the tribal men, as generous and protective male figures as she continues to romanticise herself as a Goddess worthy of worship. However, Carol, like Zaitoon, is also shaken from her slumber to realise the little worth men around her offered to women as the Major casually remarks, "it happens all the time...women get killed for one reason or the other...imagined insults, family honour, infidelity" (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.223). Further, the Army Major, after sexually exploiting Carol, refuses to marry her. The news about Zaitoon's escape and her hunt by Sakhi's tribe proves to be a last nail in the coffin and Carol decides to pack her bags for America. Similarly, Ahmad's Saba also realises how little control she has over her body and sexuality in a society that often becomes harsh to women who dare to step out of their cloisters of shyness and humbleness. She is shocked to learn that beneath the gallant mannerism of her husband Arfeen is an insecure patriarchal male easily led into suspicion. She learns that life for a woman in a male defined world is governed by her sexual purity which can easily be brought into question.

One of the other major themes that run across the works of Sidhwa, Shahrzad and Ahmad is the theme of sin, suffering and forgiveness. Sidhwa's Ayah, Shahrzad's Zari Bano and Naghmana and Ahmad's Saba, all suffer either due to the manipulation of the male members of their family or social injustice. Their sufferings eventually end with the turn of fate and then the rejected and despised female figures are begged for forgiveness. Ayah is manipulated by Ice Candy Man and later she is begged for forgiveness. Anxious to



lose her, as Ayah decides to leave for Amritsar, Ice Candy Man frets in shame and guilt as he promises Godmother that he will look after her, “‘I’ll keep her like a queen, like a flower, I’ll make her happy’, he says, and scrumming to the pressure of his pent-up misery he starts weeping” (*Ice Candy Man*, p.264). Shahraz’s Zari Bano is made to suffer unduly, as a victim of her father’s male ego and family customs only to be told later that it was all unnecessary and thereby begged for forgiveness by her father. Naghmana too is summoned as Siraj Din, on his death bed, desires to seek forgiveness from her. Similarly, Saba is summoned towards the end of the novel and all the family members especially her uncle and aunt beg her forgiveness. The change that brings the manipulators and violators of these women to seek forgiveness is the gradual realisation acquired through time and fear of death due to fatal disease or merely a turning point in the plot intentionally used by the author. This reflects a lack of contribution by the female characters towards the betterment of their lives especially in Shahraz’s novels. Sidhwa’s Ayah however initiates her escape from Ice Candy Man through Godmother’s help while Shahraz’s Zari Bano and Naghmana are passively led as the narrative progresses them from the position of a sufferer to that of a redeemer. Shahraz’s female figures remain in an emotional turmoil, easily silenced, shamed, subordinated, and drawn by pity to forgive for their sufferings whereas Sidhwa’s and Ahmad’s female figures come across as more assertive in their decisions and determined to revenge. Further Sidhwa and Ahmad create round characters that are capable of self-initiated actions whereas Shahraz, to some extent, fails to let go of her characters such as Zari Bano, Kaneez and Gulshan as all require a huge emotional counselling from external sources as friends, parents, cousins and family members to convince them of a certain action deemed necessary.

Though Shahraz does point out several harsh realities governing the lives of women in Pakistan as in *The Holy Woman* she focuses on a modern feudal family of present day Pakistan. It may be referred to as modern because the family has moved from its family home in the village Chiragpur, located in the rural part of Sindh to the neighbouring city. This migration from the rural to the urban area is obviously felt necessary for the education of Habib’s children. However, despite the physical move towards modernity and enlightenment, Shahraz reveals the traditional, feudal mentality that governs Habib’s

thinking. In fact the main female character, Zari Bano, as she dines out with her suitor Sikandar in a posh hotel in Karachi clearly states:

Don't be fooled by the modern image that confronts you. I may look the part but on the inside I am very much the product of my clan. Never forget that. I think and behave in a manner consistent with my clan's traditions. I respect and follow our centuries old traditions. The essence of my life lies with the wellbeing of my family. (*The Holy Woman*, p.50)

Zari Bano's claim stands true as she is forced to become a Holy woman after the tragic death of her only brother. As it is an ancient family tradition upon which rests her father's honour and the wellbeing of the family, therefore, Zari Bano silently becomes the pawn in the male game of family honour.

Shahraz also highlights the socio-economic disparity between the lives of women living in the villages as compared to the city life. Shahraz's characters further travel abroad as Zari Bano travels to Egypt for higher education and her family travels to the holy city of Mecca for the holy pilgrimage. In other words, her characters not only move within the country from the rural to urban settings but move out into the wider world. It's obvious that Shahraz's writing reflects her personal experiences of travel in both the Western and Islamic world. In fact her description of the inner rural settings of Pakistani villages and the lives of women remains highly stereotypical. We may say that in her keen attempt to challenge the Western stereotypical notions of the oppressed Pakistani woman Shahraz does give some unrealistic portrayals of the lives of women. Her approach clearly reflects the passionate and idealistic views of a person writing from outside the cultural settings eagerly depicting how things should be rather than portraying how they are. Although there is no harm in giving a positive outlook to the daily lives of women and their identity and Shahraz, an emerging writer in the realm of Pakistani writings in English, has been applauded especially in her efforts to bring forward a modern image of a progressive Pakistani woman.

In his key note address at a National seminar, Professor A. R. Kidwai (2010) in his paper entitled 'Representation of Muslim Woman: From the Stereotype to the New Version'

looks at the gradual development of the trend in portraying the stereotypical image of the Muslim woman to what he refers to as, “towards a new, true version of a Muslim woman” (Kidwai, 2010, p.9). In his exploration he mentions the works of many South Asian writers, male and female, who have made a contribution towards deconstructing the stereotypical image of a Muslim woman in its entire complexity regarding issues of veiling, marriages, polygamy. In this regard he gives a detailed acknowledgment to Shahraz’s *The Holy Woman*. He claims that, “the pivotal character of Zari Bano in *The Holy Woman* stands out as the quintessence and amalgam of tradition and modernity” (Kidwai, 2010, p.12). He also appreciates Shahraz’s approach in constructing this image of a modern Muslim woman, against the back drop of the old patriarchal order, which Shahraz symbolically represents through the transformation of Siraj Din and Habib, two main tyrants and agents of female victimisation in the novel. According to Kidwai (2010):

The Muslim woman (Zari Bano) manages to attain her rightful place, without vitriolic, rebellious outburst against the clergy or the male-dominated order. She is seen aspiring for and achieving her economic independence without any blood bath. Nor does she forsake her religion, waiting to be liberated by some chivalrous knight or to be redeemed by Christianity, as is habitually inscribed in the works representatives of Western literary Orientalism. Far from being the stereotypical hapless and helpless creature suffering under the patriarchal tyranny and abused as a sexual plaything, she gains the requisite life-coping skills and displays the resolve to lead her own, woman’s life in a social order still dominated by males. (Kidwai, 2010, p.12)

Though Shahraz’s contribution, as mentioned by Kidwai, cannot be ignored, however, as discussed before in my chapters on Shahraz’s novels, her approach towards the construction of a modern Muslim woman remains evidently flawed and in a nascent stage. Without repeating my arguments, I would like to add that Shahraz’s Zari Bano remains hapless, and helplessly caught in the web of patriarchal structures. Her painful shift into the realisation of her disadvantaged gendered location within her society leads her to the following conclusion:

Did you not know that men are the true creators in our culture, Mother?  
They mould our lives and destinies according to their whims and desires.

One thing you can all learn from my scenario is, and I have cried for millions of other women, that in the end, we women are just small beads in the tapestries of our clans, cleverly woven by our fathers and other male members. (*The Holy Woman*, p.176)

Unlike, as Kidwai points out, her transition into a modern woman does not come as he describes, “amazingly smooth-initiated, generated and endorsed by both male and female members of the society by their own choice” (Kidwai, 2010, p.12). Instead, Shahraz’s female figures remain passively inactive, (Zari Bano herself never makes any decision according to her own will) threatened by dire consequences (Zari Bano’s mother threatened by divorce), silently following societal norms (Zulaikha fails to contradict her husband as society accepted her to remain silent in public) and most ironic of all Zari Bano’s life is directed by the cosmic intervention as she herself passively accepts her situation as destiny and fate without making any conscious efforts for her life and identity. In fact the situation becomes highly ironic and painful as Zari Bano is fully aware of her gradual entrapment, and meek resistance followed by her silent submission which stems from her own inherent weakness, fear and lack of confidence.

Further, Siraj Din and Habib only realise their folly on their death beds, thereby not indicating any concrete change or dissolution of patriarchal order; rather they realise their mistakes and beg forgiveness only to selfishly escape punishment in their lives after death. The gradual dissolution of the patriarchal order with the death of the two main patriarchal male figures is shown to transform into the awakening of a modern Muslim society with Muslim men like Sikandar, Khawar and Younis Raees who play pivotal roles in dismantling cultural taboos and social customs by opposing these unjust practices both verbally and through action. Sikandar strongly opposes Habib Khan’s decision of turning his daughter into a Holy Woman, Khawar dislikes and disagrees with his mother’s hatred for Fatima the washer woman and insists on marrying Firdaus, Fatima’s daughter and thereby challenges the class differences and Younis Raees by marrying Kaneez not only challenges the taboo of marriage in old age especially in widowhood but also breaks the stigma of a raped and fallen woman. He allows Kaneez to step out of the cloister of shame she had imposed on herself and by accepting her shame he frees her from her self-imposed temporal and spatial confinement arising from the memories of her rape.

This image of a modern Muslim male that Shahraz presents, like her female characters again comes across as rather one dimensional, flat character portrayal where her male characters embody either extreme goodness or evilness. In contrast, Sidhwa's Muslim male characters are portrayed in a more humanistic approach. Although Major Mushtaq sexually exploits Carol, he also rescues Zaitoon as he harbours a fatherly concern for the young girl. Qasim arranges Zaitoon's marriage according to his own interest yet is shown to fend for Zaitoon, her health and education. He even names her after his dead daughter. Similarly, Nikka sexually exploits Hindu women as a disguised Hindu priest and visits prostitutes, however, Sidhwa does not fail to bring out a good side to his character; his fatherly affection remains with Zaitoon for the time she lives in Lahore and later she pines for the affectionate and protective care of Nikka when she finds herself lonely in her husband's tribe. In other words, Sidhwa's portrayal of her Muslim male and female characters may seem stereotypical and rather harsh at times, however, in reality she does attempt to present a balanced picture of a patriarchal world where men are capable of both generosity and selfishness.

Shahraz seems to attempt to dismantle all the social boundaries and limitations that restrict, define and rule the lives of people in Pakistani society in general and Pakistani women in particular. She offers and constructs an ideal society based upon the Islamic principles where not all women moan of oppression but rather, through female characters like Siraj Din's wife, she highlights the equal position women are given by the Islamic religion as Zulaikha in *Typhoon* challenges her husband:

Allah Pak (pure, one and only) is my master! You are a mortal - like me. Treat me with respect and equality. We are a cloak, a garment onto one another<sup>32</sup>. You do not have any special power over me, Siraj Din, just because you are a man. (*Typhoon*, p.125)

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<sup>32</sup> Zulaikha here refers to the verse in the Quran regarding the relationship of husband and wife. A part of this verse emphasises the privacy, sacredness, closeness and mutual respect that characterises the relationship between husband and wife in the following words, "they are clothing for you and you are clothing for them" (Quran, Surah Al-baqarah (The Cow) Verse 187).

Despite Zulaikha's claim to be an equal to her husband, pointing out no special power given to Siraj Din, ironically she fails to prove her view through action. We feel slightly disappointed as Zulaikha, socially accustomed to keep her husband's honour in public, silently listens to Siraj Din's decision in the kacheri. In other words, Shahraz's characters Zari Bano, her sister Ruby, the mother Shahzada, the mother-in-law Zulaikha, Gulshan in *Typhoon*, including Naghmana all miserably fail to display any strength of character or decision-making power. Shahraz's female figures remain a prominent victim of lower self-esteem and governed by the notion that the only form of power a woman has over her husband is that of sexual power. In a similar incident in the same novel, we come across Zari Bano's mother, a few years into her marriage and still full of insecurity and low self-esteem. Shahzada, as discussed before in the chapter on *The Holy Woman* suffers from an inferiority complex as opposed to her good looking husband, Habib. She shares her worries with her mother-in-law Zulaikha, who reminds her of her sexual power over him as a wife, "it is you he takes to his bed every night and it is you who has power over him. It is you're womb that has provided him with children" (*Typhoon*, p.103).

As evident, Shahraz seems to be implying that it is the marriage bed (husband's sexual satisfaction and children) that gives the south Asian women, especially Pakistani women the place to assert, affirm and contest the little power they may have over their husbands. Sidhwa provides a rather different approach towards female sexuality in general and Muslim female sexuality in particular. She specifically points out the 'silence' surrounding the issue of female sexuality. Through the characters of Lenny in *Ice Candy Man* and Zaitoon in *The Pakistani Bride*, she draws out the differences in their awareness towards sexual matters not only as young women but growing under the influence of non-Muslim and Muslim environment. She further highlights how the repression of sexual information from young men and women and further sexually segregating them breeds an atmosphere of 'sexual repression' in the Muslim society which has more harms than benefits. The sexual relationship between the husband and the wife therefore rather than being a bond of mutual intimacy based upon the satisfaction and gratification for both of the partners becomes, in most cases, a place of sexual battle which the husband considers his legal right irrespective of the wife's fears, worries and anxieties towards the sexual activity.

Whereas Shahraz slightly hints at the issue of marital sexual relationship, Sidhwa, on the other hand, takes a bold step into exploring the sexual dynamics through Zaitoon's sexual experience with her husband Sakhi. The sexually naive Zaitoon enters into marriage with Sakhi unaware of the power dynamics involved in the consequent sexual intercourse. As Sakhi becomes violent in his sexual advances, Zaitoon is feared into hysteria and screams to save herself. In his second attempt Zaitoon (confused at his activity, centred on the most private part of her body) refuses to let him touch her. Sakhi becomes angry and reminds her of his legal ownership of her body, "Sakhi had touched too intimately. It hurt. In a prim reflex movement Zaitoon pushed away his hand. 'No!' 'Why not? It's my cunt!' he breathed, holding her crutch in a warm squeeze (*The Pakistani Bride*, p.162). Whereas Zaitoon goes through her sexual experience driven by fear and curiosity as her sexual innocence is replaced by satisfying pleasure mostly women go through the sexual process, driven by multiple factors including, shyness, fear, religious/moral duty and most importantly necessary to avoid their husband's infidelity or second marriage.

The marital sexual power that Shahraz promises her female figures, has been researched as possibly one of the most oppressive and violent of experiences especially for South Asian woman. Margaret Abraham's (1999) study of sexual abuse in South Asian immigrant marriages highlights male sexual aggression as a norm within South Asian marriages which normalises women's experience of sexual abuse (Abraham, 1999, p.591). Though this detailed study focuses on sexual abuse, which is not central to my study, however, it is worth mentioning the sexual experience of some of the newly wedded South Asian women who found their bodies treated as a place of violation at the mercy of their husbands. Often threatened that their refusal would result in their husband's alternative pleasure seeking choices, women succumb to their husband's violent and often degrading sexual activities. As Yumna, one of the women Abraham interviewed explains how her husband would hurt her and demand sex and would say, "Do what I ask you to do because if you cannot please me, I'll probably have to look for it elsewhere" (Abraham, 1999, p.601). Abraham further asserts that:

Women often keep silent from shock and dismay because they have been socialised to place their husband's need before their own. This they have learned is the glue that holds their marriage together, because marriage is an important cultural marker of a woman's identity and social status in South Asian cultures. (Abraham, 1999, p.601)

Similarly, Shahraz's approach towards the sexual relationship between husband and wife seems to project the sexual process as a form of asserting/contesting power which, as highlighted through Abraham's study, could become a means of oppression for women rather than a form of power offering security. In other words Shahraz's female figures yearn for agency and authority by allowing their husband's unquestioned sexual control over their bodies. This explains why Gulshan feels her body or her sexual power had let her down when Haroon goes to Naghmana. It revealed her inability to hold her husband to her bed.

We come across female characters that even go the extent of bearing physical, emotional and sexual violence, as endurance and patience has been taught as the basic characteristics of married life which offers little escape. A very real example is Pakistani author Tehmina Durrani's autobiographical novel *My Feudal Lord* which describes Tehmina's suffering and her escape from a bad marriage. Tehmina Durrani's married life with Ghulam Mustafa Khar, an important political figure in the Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Government, describes the plight of Pakistani women, who, "exist as inferior beings, both intellectually and socially. Her main purpose seems to be instrument for the satisfaction of the man's sexual desires and perpetuation of the species" (Omar, 2005, p.131). Omar (2005) further describes how the first part of the novel highlights Mustafa as a tyrant who expected total submission from his wife Tehmina, as "conventional upbringing conditioned by her patriarchal social environment in which she lived, made her [Tehmina] accept her husband Mustafa's physical assaults and sexual brutality, enduring these attacks as part of destiny. That was the social ethos which inculcated itself into her being" (Omar, 2005, p.131). Tehmina Durrani in her autobiographical novel *My Feudal Lord* describes her plight in the following words:

There was not a day that Mustafa did not hit me. I just tried my best not to provoke him... I was afraid that my slightest response to his advances



would reinforce his image of me as a common slut... His class believed that a woman was an instrument of a man's carnal pleasure. If the woman ever indicated that she felt pleasure, she was a potential adulteress, not to be trusted. Mustafa did not even realise that he had crushed my sensuality. I was on automatic pilot, responding as much as was important for him, but never feeling anything myself. It was at these times that I realised that prostitution must be a most difficult profession. (*My Feudal Lord*, pp.106-107)

So whereas Tehmina's body served to fulfil her husband's sexual requirement, she remains emotionally estranged from her own body. Emotionally alienated Tehmina's body becomes an object of use for her husband, as taught by her mother that, "if a husband behaves in a strange or unreasonable manner, you should treat him like a sick human being. Like someone who needs medical care and treatment. Deal with him like a psychiatrist" (*My Feudal Lord*, p.130). After a long struggle, Tehmina finally decides to separate from her husband but at a heavy price of 'bodily' sacrifice steeped in violence. Tehmina finds her 'voice' through writing. Her autobiographical novel stands as a 'space' where she gathers the pieces of her shattered identity and makes public the atrocities she endured in her traumatic married life. It is here that we realise the role feminist literature plays in sharing the sufferings of women and their routes to self-discoveries. S.P.Swain (2005) in *The Feminine Voice in Indian Fiction* urges women to, "throw off the shackles of tradition, to educate and carve out an identity for themselves" (Swain, 2005, p.16). Swain also describes how the post-modern feminist Tasleema Nasreen, in her novel *Lajja* (shame), cautions women and calls for women to empower themselves:

If you are a woman, you must traverse beyond living death to live. They will teach you fidelity, the virtues of 'Sati', they will preach to you about womanhood. If you step into evil traps of false education, they will kiss you, lifting you in their arms, they will dance with frenzy, they will give you four walls, golden chains, they will offer you food as they do to their pet parrot. If you are a human being then break your chains and stand up. (Cited in Swain, 2005, p.16)

The female figure therefore needs to break through these confines of the patriarchal society to realise a female identity. Feminist writings as mentioned before play an important role in this regard. Therefore, the new Tehmina who finally survives the oppression learns the importance to 'voice out' and stresses that:

Silence condones injustice, breeds subservience and fosters a malignant hypocrisy. Mustafa Khar and other feudal lords thrive and multiply on silence. Muslim women must learn to raise their voice against injustice. (*My Feudal Lord*, p.362)

The need to voice out their oppression, as stressed by Tehmina, stands as an important feature of Pakistani female writers in both English and Urdu language. Therefore, Pakistani women writers make an effort to show not only multiple victimisations but the inherent courage, strength and resistance that women are capable of. Neluka Silva (2003) in her article ‘Shameless Women: Repression and Resistance in We Sinful Woman: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry’ describes the efforts of contemporary feminist poets such as Fehmida Riaz, Kishwar Naheed and Ishrat Aafreen who write about the objectification of the female body in the context of Zia’s political and Islamic agendas. Silva stresses that these women poets use poetry as a vehicle of resistance and stresses how, “the female body is appropriated in the service of political ideology, policy and power. By “writing” the body, these women are not merely raising, celebrating, or registering sexual difference but effect a political intervention and commitment to transforming the patriarchal structures of dominance” (Silva, 2003, p.46). A classic answer was given by Kishwar Naheed to a question about the possible threat of provocation due to her poetry (which is charged with bold sexual imagery) in the following words:

But when one is prohibited from living life according to one’s heart, then why bow your head and walk away? Why not make that place of slaughter the field of battle? Wage war until the last breath. So, I too could not bow down my neck. My poems are such a battle as if, by reading them in a loud voice, I survived my own slaughter...If by reading them people are aroused or startled then what’s the harm in that?. (Cited in Ananthram, 2009, p.217)

These feminist poets raise awareness in women of the bodily exploitation by men at both national and domestic level. Unsurprisingly, such bold ventures have aroused social hostility towards them but they insist on the importance of writing as a crucial medium of change. Lisa Lau Ee Jia (2003) in her article, ‘Equating Womanhood with Victimhood: The

Positionality of Women Protagonists in the Contemporary Writings of South Asian Women' highlights the plight of two female characters from two different novels, as one chooses to rebel while the other chooses submission. Jia concludes, after close analysis that, "the victimhood of South Asian women as portrayed by their writers is twofold: the victimhood of conforming and thereby suffering the injustices and oppressions, and the victimhood of rebelling, and thereby suffering alienation and shame" (Jia, 2003, p.376). Either way, the female figures remain victims of unjust attitudes constantly struggling for self-recognition and female identity. However, this does not imply that women should not resist and passively accept patriarchal oppression. On the contrary, women in oppressive situations at times through apparent submission devise ways to resist and challenge patriarchy, as evident in Saba's case. Though Saba faces alienation, shame and rejection her determination to survive, courage to find employment and raise her daughter on her own is her rejection to suffer in self-pity.

In this regard Pakistani feminist fiction remains an important weapon to fight the oppression that women face in their day to day life. As evident all the female writers Sidhwa, Shahrzad and Ahmad in their unique style capture the image of women in their perusal of identities under patriarchal structures that govern their daily lives. They explore the female identity in its entire complexity with female figures that either choose to submit or rebel according to their circumstances. Sidhwa adopts a daring approach while dealing with issues like female sexuality being a non-Muslim; Shahrzad and Ahmad on the other hand, tread carefully regarding such sensitive issues remaining within the framework of Muslim socialist writers. Furthermore, Sidhwa focuses on her characters as individuals grappling with the unjust social attitudes, Shahrzad and Ahmad's approach however remains community based, where the family interests are given precedence over individual desires.

Though Ahmad too shows an inner turmoil of her male and female characters that ends through suffering and repentance, however, as discussed before, her female characters do not compromise self-respect and dignity in the face of patriarchal pressure. Ahmad, writing predominantly for a Pakistani audience, shows the gradual disintegration of moral and social values especially by older generation Muslim women which is eating

away the social fibre of the society. She further, highlights how the rigid perpetuation of patriarchal values by women like Saba's mother-in-law proves a hindrance for social reform. Such women rigidly clinging on to the false values of piety for Muslim women dictated by patriarchal males entirely for their own interests victimise the younger generation of women like Saba who aspire for enlightenment and progress. Caught up in their false idealism of piety such women are not only the handicrafts of their ignorant males but further become trapped in their frame of thinking thus their gradual disintegration becomes a troubling situation for the very males who created them. Ahmad presents an artistic portrayal of this through the characters of Saba's mother-in-law and father-in-law.

Naomi Jayne Garner (2009) in her article 'Seeing Through a Glass Darkly: Wollstonecraft and the Confinement of Eighteenth-Century Femininity' applies Irigaray's theories of the speculum and subversive mimesis to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Garner in this essay explores Wollstonecraft's interest in women as confined objects of men's pleasure, reflecting an idealised male construction and examines the ways in which this idealisation can be undermined by subversive mimesis. For this purpose she uses the image of the mirror to describe the female as a looking glass, as trapped inside a looking glass (Garner, 2009, p.81). Garner further asserts that, "men, according to Wollstonecraft, have turned women into the vain slaves of their mirrors, the woman's only power and influence being in and over her appearance. Wollstonecraft therefore reflects back to men the beauty-obsessed monster they have created, by revealing that it is their own double standards, lust and superficiality that have resulted in the degradation of the female" (Garner, 2009,p.86).

Deriving from the above discussion the idea of 'male construction of his image of female and later being transfixed by their own creation' can be traced across the novels. For example, Ahmad's portrayal of Saba's mother-in-law and father-in-law, Shahraz's Shahzada and Habib and Siraj Din and his wife Zulaikha and even Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man in relation to Ayah reflect this situation one way or the other. Saba's mother-in-law like Shahzada and to some extent Zulaikha are carved out as ideal wives, pious and dear to their husbands. Their every act is in accordance with pleasing their husbands through

submission which is reflected as the beauty of their character. This beauty of their character is cherished and applauded by their men as they gleefully cherish their own creations; yet in the words of Wollstonecraft:

Men are not aware of the misery they cause, and the vicious weakness they cherish, by only inclining women to render themselves pleasing; they do not consider, that they thus make natural and artificial duties clash, by sacrificing the comfort and respectability of a woman's life to voluptuous notions of beauty, when in nature they all harmonise. (Cited in Garner, 2009, p.86)

Similarly, Habib, Siraj Din, and Saba's father-in-law do not consider that by cherishing their wives' subordination they are creating weak, passive and corruptible women who could lead to their destruction. Saba's mother-in-law, desperate to keep up her image of a pious woman and determined to get rid of Saba, goes to the extent of falsely swearing over the Holy Quran and thereby provokes her husband to beat Saba and later gets her son to divorce her. Both the son and the father are so transfixed and mesmerised by their mother's piety and character that they fail to think rationally and commit the folly of victimising Saba. Thus their mother brings on them not only her destruction, suffering, and death but severe repentance and guilt for the father and the son. Shahzada, similarly determined to fulfil her role of a submissive and obedient wife, is unable to put up a resistance against her husband's immoral act of turning their daughter into a Holy Woman and her silent submission triggers her husband's guilt and, after acting in haste, realises his folly as he confesses to his father:

'Father, I don't know what I am doing. Just as I am beginning to learn and regret what it is going to cost me...I forced my daughter...Shahzada desperately appealed to me not to do but in the end she gave in and stood by me'...'Well, so she should!' Siraj Din snorted indignantly. 'That's her duty'. 'Yes, she has done her duty but the payment is going to be very dear, as I have learnt to my cost. She will never forgive me, nor has she spoken to me since then. I have lost her. She knows her place and duties and is not a high-spirited woman. That is the problem! I wish she was so that we could argue and fight'. (*The Holy Woman*, p.192)

As evident, the weak and submissive character that Habib admired in his wife becomes his trap as he foolishly over-powered by his male ego steps into it and his wife, bound by duty, fails to save him of his own destruction.

Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man transforms Ayah into his ideal image by not only forcing her to change her religion but also giving her a new Muslim name and thereby assigns her a new identity. He falls in love with his creation as Ayah (Mumtaz) spends her days passively restricted within his house. However, as soon Ayah gets an opportunity she escapes leaving him transfixed in his delusional image of Ayah as Mumtaz. As Ayah shed the forced identity of a new religion and name and reverts back to her old self and identity Ice Candy Man ironically loses his sense of belonging and identity, as discussed before and wanders around like a beggar. It is as if Ayah, captured in the mirror of his imagination, breaks the spell and shows him his ugly picture of corrupt inner-self and double standards. Unable to cope and fathom his own doings Ice Candy Man slips into a delirium. A similar pattern is found between the relationship of Siraj Din and his wife Zulaikha who is also caught up in the social propriety of keeping her husband's honour in public as a dutiful wife and fails to put a stop to his foolish decision of making Haroon divorce Naghmana in the Kacheri. Siraj Din similarly repents, just like Saba's father-in-law who on discovering his wife's sin and regrets his foolishness of victimising Saba. In relation to this, Garner (2009) further describes:

Wollstonecraft continues the use of botanical language by describing women as propagators. For Wollstonecraft, men propagate, through the limited education they permit women and their general social sanctions, insignificant and decorative female flowers who in turn can produce nothing better than silly sons. Through propagation for pleasure, men corrupt women and Wollstonecraft mirrors this corruption by reflecting and revealing the fools that result from such restrictive cultivation. (Garner, 2009, p.88)

In other words, as long as men in patriarchal societies, such as Pakistan, continue to mould women into their ideal frames of submission, guised by piety and in the name of religion, they will continue to make not only a fool of themselves but continue to produce 'silly sons' and deprived daughters suffering from inferiority complex and the

never ending cycle of patriarchy will continue to demonise both men and women in the society. Therefore, restricting women within the four walls, the confines of their veils, and placing the gun of family honour on their weak shoulders by sexually exploiting and manipulating them is in a way forcing male versions of female identity on women. Capturing women within such 'mirrors' will only reflect back a dark reflection which Garner claims to be, "the male inconsistencies and their own double standards" (Garner, 2009, p.86). Pakistani female writers continue to unveil such inconsistencies and double standards that women are forced to live under.

The image of the female figure that emerges through the works of these authors is no doubt a dynamic subject with a multitude of factors contributing to its complete definition. The survival of this female figure within the patriarchal society evidently at times requires submission and at other times requires a fierce resistance. Thus the image of the female figure presented by Sidhwa, Shahrzad and Ahmad through their novels is an image of a Pakistani woman who is aware of her bodily exploitation at the hands of patriarchal men. This female figure urges for recognition as an individual and wishes to exorcise the demons of honour, modesty, and shame from her body.

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